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HORNY HAND AND BUSY BRAIN.



How now horny hand,
Toiling in the crowd,
What is there in thee or thine
That thou scornest me and mine?
Looking down so proud!
Thou'rt the bee! and I'm the drone!
NOT SO—horny hand!
Many a noble heart,
Many a REGAL HEAD,
Labours for our native land
Harder than the horniest hand
For its daily bread.

C. MACKAY.

NOBILITY OF LIFE.

'WHO BEST CAN SUFFER, BEST CAN DO.'—MILTON.

The Victoria Reign is unparalleled in the History of Great Empires for its Purity, Goodness, and Greatness!!

ABOVE ALL!!!

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'Such principles, if evoked and carried into action, would produce an almost perfect moral character IN EVERY CONDITION OF LIFE.'—SMILES.

SHAKESPEARE AND DUTY.

'Come the corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue,
If ENGLAND TO ITSELF DO REST BUT TRUE.'

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LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE.

APRIL 1890.

Virginie.

A TALE OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY VAL PRINSEP, ASSOCIATE OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABBÉ LEROUX.

THERE was but one person who did not present himself during the first days of Virginie's sojourn at the Château, and that was the curé of the village of La Beauce. Virginie noticed his absence and inquired the cause.

Her husband laughed.

'The Abbé prides himself on being unlike anyone else. He has known me many years, and probably is sulking in his tents. Better to leave him alone. He will come round more quickly so.'

The Abbé Leroux was, indeed, a curious specimen of a country priest. For twenty-five years he had filled the office of curé to this small village; for twenty-five years he had never left his cure. There was no one in his parish who had not learnt to love him. If there was a dispute it was straightway carried to the Abbé, whose judgment was final. Evildoers slunk from his path. He was followed by crowds of children, who knew full well that from the long pockets of his *soutane* the good curé would be sure to produce some sweets. The Abbé was eccentric, and, as is commonly the case, prided himself on his eccentricity. A

man of cultivation and refinement, of knowledge and talent, the Abbé might have hoped for preferment in a church where talent leads to rank and comfort. But if, in the ambition of his early novitiate, the scarlet hat of the cardinal, or at least the purple robes of a monseigneur, ever entered his dreams, the Abbé in after life put all idea of promotion on one side lightly.

‘The cotton nightcap of a peasant is easier wearing than the crown of St. Louis,’ he was wont to observe. ‘Ambition is but the tearing out of one’s heart-strings. There is no “cure,” be it ever so small, in which a priest may not find occupation for a lifetime. Besides,’ he observed to his friend, ‘I’ve a dislike of silk; it sets my teeth on edge, and, being a self-indulgent man, I cannot bring myself to undertake the penance of wearing the silk stockings of a bishop.’ So it happened that the Abbé Leroux stayed at La Beauce, his first ‘cure,’ refusing all further preferment, and contenting himself with the good he could there bring about.

‘To be a good curé of a country parish,’ the Abbé observed, ‘a man ought to be acquainted with all the pursuits and labours of the men of his parish.’ So it was no unusual sight to see the Abbé with his coat off working in the fields as a common labourer. No man was more skilful than he with scythe or reaping-hook. As his parishioners bent to their work mowing and reaping, till their backs cracked and their loins ached, it cheered them to see their Abbé working amongst them without a word of complaint. Ever ready was he with a joke or pithy rejoinder, ever willing to complete the *pièce* of those who, from sheer inability, could continue no longer at their work. Nor did he spare those who loitered or wasted their time. In agricultural matters he grew to be an authority as great as in spiritual. Was a cow or a horse ill, the Abbé was consulted. None knew better the proper time to cut the corn or sow the early crops. Till at last, seeing himself an oracle to these good people, he began to fancy himself and his advice necessary to them. Even Poirier, the holder of the largest farm in the neighbourhood, who was a man fond of having his own way, was forced, by the superiority of the Abbé’s position and talent, to bow before his opinion. When even Poirier yielded, might not a man of the most modest temperament think there was something in him above the common level?

For La Beauce himself he had a sincere friendship and respect, notwithstanding the Comte’s liberal ideas, for which,

indeed, in his heart the Abbé had a great sympathy. He heard of his friend's marriage with amazement, and, if the truth were known, was piqued to think that so mighty a change in his friend's life had been brought about without his assistance. He could hardly believe that all was right. He feared the Comte had been entrapped by some heartless siren of Versailles, and resented the idea that all the plans for good that he had formed, and through the assistance of his wealthy friend mostly realised, might now be upset through the influence of the new comer. In truth, if there was one weakness which the Abbé cherished more than another, it was a horror of the sex, not as he met it, arrayed in cap and apron, respectful and attentive to authority, but clad in silks and satins, and filled with philosophy and small talk, as were the ladies of the Parisian *salons*.

'Monsieur le Curé,' asked one of his parishioners, 'have you seen our new Comtesse? Ah, what a beauty!'

'So much the worse for her,' answered the Curé, turning away.

'Ah, Monsieur le Curé!' cried the matron of many children we have just mentioned, 'Madame la Comtesse is an angel.'

'Silence!' snarled the Abbé; 'talk not so lightly of those who are above: it is sufficient for a Comtesse to smile, and all would canonise her.'

Nor was the Abbé more pleased to find that on the first Sunday after Virginie's arrival his little church was crowded as though it were a high festival of the Church. Many were there who never came except at Christmas or Easter. Even Poirier, who, as a rule, in spite of the Abbé's exhortations, thought an ordinary mass beneath the dignity of one so well-to-do—even Poirier, in his best blue coat, already too tight for him, was early in his place. The Abbé groaned in spirit. He knew it was a curiosity, more powerful than his weightiest exhortations, that had brought these people. He, at all events, would not look; he cared not to see this fine lady; and so, when service began, he carefully and studiously avoided casting his eyes towards the chairs reserved for the people of the Château. But as the 'Credo' was sung he was aware of a voice, rich and beautiful, that seemed to give a swing and rhythm to the Gregorian chant, the only music he would allow, which he, in spite of all his teaching, could never attain. The voice swelled and filled the little church, and that without flourish or parade, but simply and decorously. Involuntarily, the 'Credo' being finished, and the

voice still, he allowed his eyes to wander over the edge of his book. Virginie was kneeling in simple devotion. She was clad in grey, a colour she much affected. Her eyes were cast down. She seemed unconscious of the effect she created.

At the 'Gloria' again her voice rose in solemn praise; other voices seemed hushed, the congregation listening rather than offering their thanksgiving. Abbé Leroux was scandalised. He beat time with his book on his hand, and raised his own voice in protest against the people. The Abbé had a good musical voice, and his rage was increased when he found that by singing he added to the charm of Virginie's contralto, his notes blending so happily with hers that the chant, which should have been swelled by the voices of the whole congregation, became a kind of duet. It was in vain he beat time with greater energy, he could not in very shame stay his song of praise, and the more energy he put into his part, the more beautiful seemed the voice of the new Comtesse; nor was his vexation less when he found himself watched by his old friend and pupil the Comte, in whose observant eyes he could detect a look of latent humour, as they observed the effect produced by the glorious voice of his wife. Yet when he glanced at Virginie he could see no triumph, no desire for admiration in her face. She was rapt in the simple music, and when it was over bent her head as humbly for his benediction as the lowliest village maiden.

The good Abbé had prepared and thought out a sermon on the perils of wealth, the temptations of pride; a sermon appropriate to the situation in which his audience should be rebuked for crowding to see their new mistress, when they ought to have come naturally to worship in the temple of their God. Many and excellent points had occurred to him. He felt severe and would not spare. But when he glanced down towards the cause of his anger, and saw that sweet face with the soft velvety eyes turned upwards towards him, his soul relented. He felt it would be a brutal act to strike a defenceless woman, one too who, for all he knew, might be perfectly innocent of offence, except that she was the wife of a friend. Her then he spared, but his parishioners at least were legitimate objects on which to vent his spleen. Poirier's blue coat was an offence to him, and when he saw his fat face, with its staring eyes, turned away from him in the direction of Virginie, his wrath rose.

'Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's and unto God the things that be God's,' he cried, and, enlarging on the text,

he preached in a way to astonish the simple people among whom he had lived so many years. Even Poirier was drawn from his calf-like admiration of the new Comtesse, and listened, with mouth open, to the anathemas denounced on those who sacrificed their religion to curiosity, and forgot their God in their foolish love of the world.

After the short sermon came the Litany to the Virgin, which was sung. Here again the Abbé heard the same voice, so full, so rich, and yet so simple, and the good man, who had really a great love of music, was so touched that he could hardly perform his part of the service.

When all was over and the Abbé retired to disrobe, the old thoughts came back. No! he would not yield. The woman was probably an accomplished coquette, whose only merit was that she had a beautiful voice. So he lingered in the little room where his vestments were kept, in the hope that the La Beauce party might have gone before he left his den. Alas! the Abbé was not in luck. On leaving the sacristy the first thing he saw was a crowd blocking up the only issue from the churchyard, in the midst of which was La Beauce with his wife, who was making a kind of triumphal procession through her husband's tenants, to each of whom she addressed a kind word. The Abbé drew himself up with dignity, and strode down the path. Perhaps he felt his influence over the people of the village was being diminished. No one can be expected to welcome a rival, who comes to share what has been for many years an undivided empire.

The Abbé was a tall thin man. As the people made way for him, he held his head erect. He bowed to La Beauce and his wife, with the exact amount of courtesy he considered due to the feudal proprietor of the parish he administered, and would have passed on, but the Comte laid his hand familiarly on his sleeve.

'My dear Abbé,' he said with a smile, 'it is time you should know my wife. I was rash to have plunged into the married state without your aid, but when you hear that Madame la Comtesse was for many years the favoured pupil of the Abbé de Berulle, at Chartres——'

'How!' cried the Abbé, 'madame knows the excellent De Berulle?'

'I was for eleven years at the Convent of the Visitation.'

'Ah, madame, what a good man!' And tears stood in the Abbé's eyes, for the Abbé de Berulle was the one friend of his

youth and manhood, for whom he had preserved an unalterable affection.

'Monsieur l'Abbé,' said Virginie, 'my husband tells me that you always dined at the Château on Sunday. Why should so excellent a custom be changed? Come, and we can talk of my dear confessor and friend.' And she held out her hand.

The Abbé was overcome, and promised. And as he strode away towards his house, he muttered—

'Imbecile, thou art ever jumping to wrong conclusions! When wilt thou learn to be tolerant of those against whom thou knowest nothing?'

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE CHATEAU LA BEAUCE.

EVERY Sunday after this the Abbé Leroux came to the Château to dine, and after dinner he and Virginie sang and played together. La Beauce himself had a good voice and correct ear, and was soon admitted to a share in the concert, while the Abbé, having confessed that he performed on the violoncello, was without much difficulty persuaded to bring his instrument to the Château, where Virginie could accompany him on the piano. The rich notes of this little concert were, in the quiet of the summer evenings, borne through the open windows, and the tenants of the farm-buildings and house soon began to linger on the terrace to enjoy the music. Little by little the audience increased in number, till soon nearly the whole village was drawn to the terrace 'to hear the Comtesse.' The keen eye of the Abbé saw at once the good influence such gatherings might be made to exercise. He suggested to the Comte that these good people should be allowed to indulge in harmless gaiety.

'For,' said he, 'those who have been working hard during the week are none the worse for relaxation on the Lord's day. Their lives are dull enough, God knows. It is seldom they can feel any of the pleasures we can draw from the resources of art and education. Let them, then, hear good music and dance gaily, that their minds may be better accorded to the performance of those toilsome duties which form the occupation of the greater part of their lives.'

Thus it came to pass that on Sunday evenings there was

always a joyous gathering on the terrace of the Château, where people danced and listened to music. And amongst the happy throng La Beauce and his wife, accompanied by the Abbé, moved familiarly, controlling by their presence any unseemly levity, without discouraging innocent mirth and happiness. And when the golden twilight had reddened off in the distant west, the happy peasants, in little parties, returned to their homes, their cheery voices, echoing the music they had heard, gradually sinking into silence. Then the Abbé himself would enter the house of his friend with a beaming face, and partake of a simple glass of 'eau sucrée.'

'Madame,' he would say with a bow to Virginie, 'you have brought among us the civilising qualities of the most glorious art. Can it be supposed that any one of those who have to-day enjoyed themselves here is not the better man for what he has felt? Ah! madame, if those in your position knew their duty, we should have less heartburning and bickering up there,' and the Abbé pointed in the direction of distant Paris.

Amongst the Abbé's most cherished prejudices was a hatred of the capital, from which he could not allow any good could proceed. But La Beauce would answer—

'It is not merely the right of dancing or a licence for music that will suffice. Let the Frenchman be made to feel he is a man, and have a pride in his condition. Let men be equal, and let merit be the only means of raising a man above his fellows,' he would cry with generous warmth.

The Abbé would take a long pinch of snuff, then he would answer—

'Let all men be good, all laws equitable, and all women as beautiful as madame'—here he would bow to Virginie—'till then your equality is misleading, and the pride a man feels in himself mere conceit. Nay, now,' he would cry, stopping his friend, 'what is this equality which shows itself in the destruction of the houses of the rich by their poorer neighbours, or what is the pride which raises man to an equality with his Creator?'

Then would follow an argument between the two, which sometimes raged with violence till Virginie was forced to intervene as a mediator. Both men were equally anxious for the good of their fellows, but, while La Beauce would be content to employ secular means, the good Abbé believed the only good results were to be gained by the influence of religion and good example.

A simple people were the tenants of the Comte de la Beauce, a people prone to love those who study to understand them. And Virginie soon acquired the necessary knowledge. Aided by her husband and the Abbé Leroux she made personal acquaintance with everyone on the estate. Soon each morning she had to hold a levée of tenants, hearing each tale of distress and wrong, giving relief where it was possible, and at all events listening patiently to all they had to say. Those who are raised by their rank and position above their fellow-man have, if they knew it, but little to do to secure popularity. It is by showing sympathy that love and respect are gained, more than by the doubtful generosity of lavish expense. So it was that Virginie heard each piteous tale of the misery caused by the bad husband, the dissipated son, or the neglectful wife; she became the arbitress in every dispute and the generous alleviator of distress.

The only person who was a real thorn to her side was the amiable and good-natured Louison. At the Château she assumed the position of Virginie's maid, but the service in a great house was very different from that at the Couronne d'Or. There she could be everything to her mistress, whereas at the Château there were many others with whom Virginie had to act and who were zealous in her service. She could not bear to see anyone near her mistress. She was conscious of her real inferiority to Madame Chapuis, the dignified housekeeper, both in education and efficiency, yet she could not persuade herself to take her orders from one who had known Virginie so short a time. She sneered at the kind old thing's dress, she mimicked her ways, she openly rebelled against her authority. And in a lesser degree she had the same antipathy to the servants. Had they not been old and tried retainers of the La Beauce family, they would have probably given up their situations rather than stood the impertinences of the apple-cheeked peasant. As it was, they shrugged their shoulders, and did their best to put up with what they styled the bad breeding of their mistress's maid. But Virginie was quick to perceive that the sneers of Louison were not unheard by the housekeeper, nor did she fail to observe that once when Louison announced 'that old idiot Madame Chapuis,' the old lady entered the room with tears in her eyes.

'Louison,' she said, 'leave the room until you know how to behave with propriety to your superiors.'

Louison tossed her head and stalked out, muttering audibly—

'Well, indeed! After all I've done to be thrown over for this old thing!'

After Virginie had given her orders and soothed the feelings of the old housekeeper, she sent for Louison. But that damsel would not stir from her room, and, when her mistress went there to talk with her, she put on so injured a tone that Virginie who came to scold was made to feel that she herself was the person to be forgiven!

Virginie had great feelings of pity for the girl. She was pleased to have her with her, as she reminded her of her former life at Sèvres. She therefore consulted with her husband. He laughed at her. Louison amused him. He would be sorry to lose her.

'But the other servants!' cried Virginie.

'They have not complained.'

'Oh! you do not know what they suffer.'

'Then send her away.'

'But she will not go!'

'Then marry her off to someone.'

Here was an idea. Louison was really good-looking for a peasant girl. She had pretty bright eyes and healthy cheeks, and if her mouth was large she had beautiful teeth. Marry her off! of course.

Now, there was a fine young fellow, the son of the bailiff of the home farm, the very thing.

So Louison was sent constantly on messages to Louis, and Louis, nothing loth, was sent with her to Chartres to make some purchases. La Beauce offered Louis a small farm if he could find a suitable wife. And the result was that Louison one day came to her mistress very red and excited.

'See, madame!' she cried, 'that great calf Louis! What does madame think he has done?'

'What, Louison?'

'He has asked me to marry him! the idiot!' cried the indignant girl.

'Well, Louison, if thou likest the man.'

'What! leave madame for a man like that? Not likely!'

'But thy future, my good girl,' said Virginie kindly. 'Louis offers thee a comfortable home for life. Thou oughtest to think of that.'

'Does madame really wish me to leave her?' cried Louison, growing as pale as she had been red before; 'if she does, then let me die!' Then she fell on her knees and kissed Virginie's hand.

'Ah, send me not away,' she sobbed.

So Louison stayed on,

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY AND PEASANT.

THE Comte and Comtesse had been back at the Château about a month. The duties of châtelaine had gradually assumed a quiet routine, in which Virginie found every moment of her day pleasantly occupied. The month of July was past, and, although the harvest was deficient in many parts of France, in the Beauce there was an average crop. So the farmers were preparing in pleasant anticipation of harvest in early August, and everyone was busy on the land. The Sunday evenings were fast growing into a settled institution, to which not only the peasant labourers resorted, but even the larger farmers came, finding it convenient to meet and converse with their neighbours, and not being indifferent to the pleasure of hearing music, and joining in the simple mirth to which the evening was devoted.

One day Virginie received a letter from Célimène, telling her that Madame de la Rosière had been pronounced by the doctors beyond the reach of science, and that at any time she might be taken away. She begged Virginie to allow her husband to go to Chartres to pay a visit to his aunt, who had expressed a wish to see him; at the same time she warned him not to say a word about his marriage, of which his aunt was still ignorant, for the slightest shock might prove fatal to her.

The Comte then prepared to start at once, and it was settled he should go alone. Virginie sent an affectionate letter to Célimène, offering, if she could be of the slightest use, to go to Chartres and help to nurse Madame de la Rosière. At the same time, she begged her friend to look on her as a sister, and to consider the Château as her home.

Bearing this letter with him, La Beauce started for Chartres. At the last minute his wife got into the carriage to accompany him some part of the way, thinking, as the day was fine, she could have a pleasant walk back through the woods, and, at all events, scheming, in her loving heart, the postponement of her good-bye to her husband for a few minutes. It was the first time they had parted for more than an hour, yet they had been married six weeks!

When Virginie alighted from the carriage, and saw it roll slowly away till it became a mere cloud of distant dust on the

straight road to Courville and Chartres, she felt singularly lonely. After all, it was only for a few hours; possibly he might return that very night. But she turned into the pathway which was the short cut through the woods with a sigh. She thought of poor Célimène and her mother, who had been so kind to her, and to whom she owed her husband; she thought of that husband, and was almost jealous that, at the first grief he had to encounter since her marriage, she should not be by his side to console. Could happiness never be perfect? Was it impossible to be so much to the loved one as to never part from him, never have any care unshared, or even a thought unreciprocated?

So passed she on communing with herself, till the rustle of a bird rising from the wood, and the sharp whirl of the wings, roused her, and she became conscious of the beauty of the scene. The trees were in the full luxuriance of early August; the air around was stilled with the exuberant ripeness of summer, but the fierceness of the harvest sun came to her tempered by 'mottled shade.' Mysterious glancing lights on stem and leaf alone reminded her of the dust and glare of the high road she had left. Here everything was calm and peaceful, so that her very footfall was noiseless in the moss and grass. Now a merry little rabbit would leap from its lair, and, seeing her, would scuttle off, its white tail twinkling in the gloom of the underwood, till it was the last thing seen as the little animal dived into its home; now a roe-deer, with dainty legs, would trot along the path, turn a moment with wondering eyes to gaze at the intruder, and then skip and skip until it vanished. Now a jay would gleam with azure wing, and fly off with discordant cry, making the woods echo, as though to give warning to the defenceless inhabitants of the grove that it was not the only marauder abroad. Virginie's heart filled with gratitude for her loving life. For all these things reminded her of her husband. These were his, and, being his, were the more beautiful. What a difference this from the limited musings of the convent garden, or the mad bustle of the Couronne d'Or! And her father—what was he doing? Scolding his dependents, no doubt, already oblivious of the fact that he had a daughter. Had he forgotten? She could not think so. Had he forgotten her during the eleven years she was at Chartres? In the calm and stillness of these woods she thought of his love for her when she was a little child, of his yearly visits, and his delighted face as he greeted her with hearty laugh and twinkling eye. Was it pos-

able she had misunderstood him? His was another nature, so different from those she had been accustomed to in the convent. She had had some experience since she left Sèvres. She had seen something of life. She had heard the language of the people around her. Did they not love because their tongues wagged freely? Of what had she to complain? That her father judged her as he would have done one of his class? What was her sensitiveness but wounded pride? How was it with Him who bade men turn the other cheek for the proffered blow? Pondering all these things as she paced along, Virginie felt very humble. It was the first time she had had the leisure to think of this. The glamour of the presence of her loved husband had been withdrawn; she seemed to see more clearly, and the conviction came upon her that perhaps she, who counselled her inferiors with such apparent wisdom and authority, needed counsel herself more than those who looked up to her as a better and purer being. And as she walked along she hung her head from shame.

So sauntered she through the woods, fearing nothing. Suddenly a louder crackling of boughs attracted her attention. Could it be a stag? No. She saw with some dismay, stepping from the underwood, into the very path by which she had to gain her home, a tall gaunt man. A broad-brimmed, slouched hat shaded his face, only a rusty-looking beard appearing beneath. He was clothed in an old and worn woollen garment, originally of a bluish colour, reaching to his knee; some thick worsted stockings covered his legs, which ended in a pair of sabots, such as the lower class of peasant usually wore. Round his waist he had a leathern girdle studded with nails. In one hand he held a couple of rabbits, in the other a stout cudgel with a large knob on the end. Virginie was startled at the sudden appearance of this man. He was evidently a poacher, the rabbits proved that, but he appeared unabashed at being detected; he seemed even menacing as he stood waiting for her in the middle of the path. The situation was one that might have terrified most women. Virginie, however, was not of a very timorous disposition, and, when she had recovered from her first surprise, quickly made up her mind that her best plan was to confront this man. Flight was out of the question, and any appearance of hesitation or fear might be an incentive to violence, while crying out would be of no avail, as she was far out of hearing of the road, and she knew there were no houses or passers-by within reach of her voice. Luckily, in the gossip of the village which had been brought to her, she had

heard of a certain man, nominally a charcoal-burner, but really a poacher and general ne'er-do-weel, who lived on the borders of the La Beauce property, and was the terror of the neighbourhood. Him she fancied she recognised in the man before her. She therefore advanced with seeming unconcern, though her heart beat quickly, and boldly accosted the stranger.

'Good-day,' he answered sulkily, in a deep hoarse voice.

'You are, I fancy, Jean Durand?' she asked.

'And what if I am?' he growled defiantly.

'I am glad to have met you. You are not one of our tenants, or I should have been to see you before this,' said Virginie with assumed cheerfulness.

'I want no one's visits; I wish to be left alone, and have nothing to do with people such as thou,' he said brutally, and grasped his stick in a menacing manner.

'I do not wish to thrust my society on anyone,' answered Virginie, 'only I heard you had a son very ill, and I thought I might be of assistance.'

'And who told thee my little Jean was ill?' he said.

'One of your neighbours.'

'I'd thank them to mind their own business.'

'Nay, it was one who had helped to the extent of her power, and only regretted she could do no more.'

'The Mère Michel?'

'Yes; the Mère Michel. Come, you must let me pay you a visit, and see whether I can do anything for this little one. I may be able to make things more comfortable for him. You must not let your feelings stand in his way.' She spoke very softly, and laid her hand on his rough sleeve. The man gave a slight start as she touched him, and gazed at her with a dazed look in his grey eyes.

'And who art thou? The new wife of—of—M. de la Beauce?' the words seemed to stick in his throat.

'Yes! I am Virginie de la Beauce.'

The man looked rather sheepishly down.

Virginie imagined it was the presence of the two rabbits that embarrassed him.

'Yes,' she said; 'I see; but do not be afraid. If you had asked, M. de la Beauce would have given you permission to trap rabbits about your home. I will tell him I have done so for him.'

'The rabbits!' growled the man, with a kind of revulsion of feeling. 'They are God's creatures. M. de la Beauce did not

rear them; they are as much mine as his, since they will feed on my garden stuff without my leave as much as on his underwood,' and he grasped his stick again, and his eyes glared fiercely.

'Anyhow,' said Virginie, 'I am glad you have them to make a good soup for little Jean. How is the little man? I hope he is better.'

'Bad! very bad!' said the man hoarsely.

'I am sorry. Can nothing be done for him?'

'Ah!' said the man, 'what do I know? He is tossing all night with fever, and he clasps me in his arms, and calls on me to ease the pain in his limbs, until I am half mad. Sometimes he knows me not, and talks strangely. What can I do?' and this rough being turned away and sobbed in his agony, while the tears ran down his rugged cheek.

'My friend,' said Virginie, laying her hand without fear on his arm, 'you must let me come to-night to see him; show me the way to the Château, and I will bring what I can for him. Come quick!' and in her energy she pointed eagerly onwards.

'You, madame? You will do this? You, Madame de la Beauce?'

'Why not?' asked Virginie. 'Come, let us be quick.'

The man hesitated a minute; then, yielding to Virginie's eagerness, turned and led the way along the path. So this ill-assorted couple strode through the woods together. The sun, now sloping towards the west, shot between the stems of the trees, now striking on the soft cheek of the fair woman, now on the rusty beard of the man. Her rich dress and his well-worn rags alike caught the golden beam, and, under its impartial rays, both alike glittered as though they were made of equally costly material. So walked they on, now side by side, and now, when the bushes encroached on the path, the man first to hold back the boughs and brambles, and allow her to pass. At length, when they came to a broader stretch of open, the man broke the silence.

'Madame,' he said, in a husky voice, looking straight in front of him, 'do you know you were in great peril of your life but a few minutes ago?'

'What, I?' said Virginie, with affected unconcern. 'In peril from you? Not I!'

'It is a fact, nevertheless,' said Durand. 'I was mad with grief at not being able to help my boy, and when I saw you coming towards me with that gold chain round your neck and those rings on your hands the devil prompted me to take them

and pay for what my boy wanted. The woods are thick, and sounds penetrate but a short way.'

'You see,' said Virginie gravely, 'it was not the devil but the good God that inspired me to offer to help your boy, and so spared you the sin of having my blood on your hands.'

The man gazed wistfully from beneath his hat at this fearless woman, this countess, who could thus talk to him, Jean Durand, the poacher.

'And you were not afraid?' asked he.

'What of? I know no man but has some good in him, and I knew from the Mère Michel that you loved your boy and tenderly loved him.'

'The Mère Michel spoke the truth.'

'I could not suppose such a man would attack a defenceless woman who had done him no wrong,' said Virginie, looking straight in the man's face, while he hung his head.

Then she talked of the boy, and Durand's tongue was loosened and he described his illness, which Virginie recognised as a kind of rheumatic fever, and he told her they had lost two children already, and that this was their last—their brightest. 'Petit Jean!' he murmured to himself, and lapsed into silence.

But Virginie bade him be of good cheer. All that could be done she would do. The issue was in the hands of the Great Being who ruled all things. Surely He would not take Petit Jean, for He was all mercy and gentleness towards those who loved Him.

So they trudged on till they stood on the avenue, not far from the Château. Then Jean Durand stopped.

'Madame will excuse me,' he said, 'I cannot go further. I cannot bear to be laughed at by your servants. I will wait here till you return—for you will return, Madame,' he added piteously.

'As you will,' said Virginie. 'Of course I will return, and that shortly. How far is it to your house by the nearest way?'

'Two-thirds of a league,' said Durand.

'Then I will have my pony saddled that we may go the faster. I am, I fear, a poor walker,' she added with a smile. Then she held out her hand. 'Have no fear; I shall not be more than half an hour at the latest.'

The man seized her hand, and, taking off his hat, kissed it reverently.

'May the God you worship bless you!' he cried in a broken

voice; 'but, for His mercy's sake, be not too long. Petit Jean waits for his father.'

'He shall not have to wait long,' cried Virginie, as she sped on her way. Somehow she had never felt so happy—and she had been very happy since her marriage.

She hurried to the house, ordering her pony to be saddled as she passed the stables. Then she quickly got together a number of things she kept in her sanctum for the use of her poorer neighbours: some simple fever medicine, some pieces of flannel, a couple of blankets, and a jar of strong soup. Then she scribbled a short letter to her husband, telling him where she was going, in case he returned before she did. While she was doing this Louison entered the room.

'Madame goes out again?' asked she.

'Yes,' said Virginie, 'I am taking these things to a sick family.'

'Madame is imprudent; these illnesses are catching.'

'Nonsense!' cried Virginie.

'Madame is too good to these people; they have no gratitude, yet madame treats them as though they were of the family.'

'Allow me to judge what I should do. By the bye, I may be late. If monsieur should return before I do, be so good as to give him that letter.'

'Monsieur away, and you stop out late!' observed Louison, pursing up her mouth, and weighing the letter in her hand as though she were assaying its value in comparison with this unaccountable absence.

'Do as I tell you,' said Virginie sharply. Then she strove to arrange the things she had selected in a basket, while Louison stood by without offering to aid. At length, everything being packed, Virginie rang the bell.

'What does madame wish?'

'I wish one of the men to carry this basket for me.'

'One of the men, the idle creatures!' cried Louison. 'Am I not here? Does madame require anyone else?'

And the strong wench seized the heavy basket and carried it down the stairs.

At the door stood Virginie's pony, held by a stout groom.

'Charles, take that basket and follow me,' said Virginie, mounting her pony by the horse-block that stood by the entrance steps. Louison darted defiant glances at poor Charles as he

followed her mistress with the heavy load. Why was not she taken?

When they arrived at the place where she had left Durand, he was not to be seen. Suspecting the reason, Virginie dismissed the groom, bidding him return to the house, as someone would come for the basket. The lad left as ordered, but he kept looking back suspiciously. No one, however, appeared till he had passed out of sight. No sooner had the groom disappeared than the cracking of the underwood told her Jean Durand was coming. He appeared so suddenly from his hiding-place that she was quite startled, but he laughed in a hoarse way, and said, 'Excuse an old poacher,' and, seizing the basket, shouldered it with ease, crying—

'Now, madame, let us haste. Petit Jean waits.'

CHAPTER XXII.

PETIT JEAN.

JEAN DURAND strode through the paths of the wood at a pace that forced the pony Virginie mounted to break into a trot, and as he went he seemed to embrace the basket which brought relief to his boy. For half an hour they sped on. The sinking sun shot its red beams aslant on the two, reddening the pale cheeks of the man and flashing on the tears which ever and anon rose to his eyes. Presently they arrived at a sort of borderland between two woods, in which stood a wretched hovel, which claimed Jean Durand as its master.

Jean stopped abruptly as they passed out of the wood. 'Madame,' said he, in a low voice, 'will be pleased to descend from her pony; the little one might be frightened if he heard a noise.'

Virginie slipped off the pony, assisted by her rough escort, and Jean tied the beast up to a tree. They then walked softly to the house. Jean listened as he laid his hand on the latch, and he heard the weak voice of the little invalid, whose quick ear had heard his footstep.

'It is father!' cried a weak child's voice.

The father turned with a sad smile to Virginie as he opened the door. He entered, placed the basket on the floor, and softly crept to the bedside.

'It is father, little one,' he whispered tenderly, 'and he has brought an angel to see his boy!'

'An angel! what is that? Someone like mother, only with wings?' said the weak voice.

'No, Jean, this is a great lady, who is kind to the poor people, and has brought a big basket for little Jean, with all kinds of good stuffs to make him well again!'

'Let me see her, father,' cried the child eagerly, and Virginie stepped forward.

She had meanwhile glanced round the cabin: it was bare enough. On the floor was a rough bed, evidently that occupied by the father and mother, who had given up the regular bed-place made in the wall, like the bunk on board ship, to the son. An old armchair, two stools, a rickety table, and equally dilapidated wooden press were all the furniture of the place. There was a fire on the hearth, and by it sat the mother—old and gaunt before her time—her hair, rusty with neglect, falling on each side of her hollow cheeks, beneath a handkerchief tied round her head, her eyes red and heavy with watching and want of sleep. Yet there was the trace of some beauty left in this woman, in spite of want and sorrow, that had, perchance, added to the wistful look of her eyes. The *Mère Durand*, for such she was, rose when she saw Virginie, and instinctively tried to arrange her hair under its discoloured headdress, but it fell back again as she stood with a surprised and rather alarmed look staring at her lady visitor. Virginie whispered to her to be of good cheer, that she had come to help her with her boy, and advanced to the bed. It was wretched enough, this bed, more like the lair of a wild animal than the resting-place of an invalid; but Virginie bent over it without showing her repugnance, and, taking the hot hand of the child, kissed his burning head.

'Don't go away like my dreams,' cried the child; 'stay with me, beautiful angel!' and he convulsively clutched her hand.

'Be sure I will stop,' said Virginie, as she gently stroked his temple with her soft cool hand, and the little fellow lay back and half closed his eyes under the soothing touch.

'Oh, madame,' whispered the wife and mother, 'you are good!'

Jean, the father, looked from the bed to the basket. If this lady had such an effect on his child, what good might not the treasures he had carried with such care produce?

'Madame,' he said softly, 'the basket?'

'True,' said Virginie, 'open for yourselves.'

Jean did not hesitate. He produced a villainous-looking knife and quickly cut the cords. He then brought out one by one the contents, half bewildered with the variety, handling the bottles as though they contained all the treasures of France.

The boy opened his eyes from time to time, to see whether the angel had fled, and smiled at seeing her still by his side.

'Where does it pain thee?' asked Virginie, stooping down to the poor child.

'Oh, madame,' said Mère Durand, 'his left arm and both legs are terribly swollen.'

Quickly then Virginie set to work. She dexterously withdrew the damp and dirty bedclothes and substituted the blankets she had brought. She swathed the suffering limbs in cotton-wool, and covered them with flannel warmed at the fire. She bade the mother heat the soup, and measured out a dose of soothing medicine in a glass. Everything seemed changed as if by magic. Little Jean no longer complained, but lay quiet and comfortable in his bed-place, following with his eyes 'the angel,' as he called her, while the mother listened to her direction as to the quantity and frequency of the dose to be given.

Meanwhile the father gazed in helpless bewilderment. It was the beneficent creature he had doomed to destruction. These great people, then, were not all bad as he had fancied. Here was one for whom he, at the moment, would willingly have laid down his life. This Jean, this terror of the neighbourhood, had a depth of tenderness in his nature of which he himself was quite unconscious. Distress and poverty had made him what he was. In early youth of a wild and daring nature, he had been the recognised leader of all the bold youths in the neighbourhood, and as poaching had the excitement of sport added to the danger of detection, he had been an inveterate and successful poacher. At that time game was guarded by the jealous laws framed by a ruling class of sportsmen. He had been caught and mercilessly lashed by order of a neighbouring noble in whose woods he had been detected redhanded. He had been branded on the shoulder and let loose. From that moment he had hated the whole class of proprietors. As the hot iron seethed his flesh he had sworn to be revenged, and for years he had waited, and now, when the time seemed to be arrived, one of this very class had stepped in and relieved his misery, offering more than mere alms, for that he would have indignantly refused, but sympathy and tender assist-

ance. His convictions were upset, his purpose was shaken, and as he watched Virginie ministering to his sick child, he swore that, come what might, she and hers should have his faithful service.

Night had now set in. The boy slept, soothed by the warmth of his comfortable covering, and the effects of the draught he had taken. The Mère Durand was crouching over the embers of the fire pouring her tale of woe into the sympathetic ear of Virginie. Jean had brought Virginie's pony into a shed used by him to store his winter fuel, and was sitting absorbed in thought in the corner of the room, to which he retreated from a feeling quite new to him of bashfulness and shame at his rough uncouth appearance. In the still of the night the monotonous whisper of the mother was all that broke the silence of the room. So passed the time, when suddenly footsteps were heard approaching. Jean moved uneasily, and sat up alert, casting wistful glances towards Virginie. A light tap at the door was heard. Jean got up and carefully opened it, and through it was seen a figure clad much as Jean was clad, while in the distance were other figures of the same aspect. Little Jean turned uneasily in bed, awakened by the sound, and asked querulously in his weak voice whether the angel had flown away. Virginie rose at once and went to the bed and took the child's hand, and placed her other hand on his forehead. He was in a profuse perspiration, and, as she stroked his temples, fell back asleep, still clasping her hand. Jean disappeared; Mère Durand listened eagerly, and her quick ears heard indignant expostulation and loud voices in the distance—then footsteps getting gradually fainter, and her 'man' reappeared.

What had happened? This. Jean had been summoned by a party of peasants who were bent on burning down the château of a neighbouring noble, the very one who had branded and ill-treated him, but to the astonishment of his friends, who had counted on him to lead them, he pleaded his son's illness and refused. In vain they urged his former promise, and expostulated, not without anger; Jean was firm in his refusal. Then some called him traitor, coward and turntail, and even threatened vengeance. Jean, whose patience was none of the best, answered savagely that they might think what they liked, he cared for no man's threats; they must do their work without him for that night, he would not join them—then he turned and left them. They too, having consulted together, disappeared. As for Jean,

he noiselessly re-entered his house, and sat down in his old place as though nothing had happened.

So passed another hour. Still the child slept. Nothing now broke the silence of the house save the hard breathing of the mother, who, herself quite worn out, had sunk to sleep on her rough seat with her head leaning against the wall.

But again a sound was heard approaching. This time Jean rose, and coming close to Virginie, who had taken her old place by the fire and was deep in thought, whispered, 'Madame, a horse is coming. It is probably someone for madame, who had better show herself, to avoid a noise which might wake the boy.'

Virginie at once rose to leave the house, and Jean, with all the alacrity and dexterity of an experienced cavalier, placed her cloak round her shoulders and noiselessly opened the door.

It was the Comte. Virginie saw him riding towards the house and advanced to meet him. For the first time she saw his face darkened with displeasure; on seeing her he threw himself off his horse.

'Virginie,' he cried, 'what mad freak is this? What could possess you to leave the house and stay away all these hours in the night? Think what people will say!'

But Virginie placed her arm round his neck and kissed him. 'Etienne,' she said, 'I have never been so happy as I am now. I have done what I am sure is a good action.'

Then she told her tale. La Beauce had been very angry. On arriving at the Château from Chartres he had been met by Louison, who with a mysterious smile had informed him that madame had left the Château some hours before.

'Left the Château!' cried he, 'and whither has she gone?'

'I cannot say,' said Louison; 'on some mysterious errand that she would not tell me. She gave me this letter for monsieur,' and she gave Virginie's letter. It was necessarily short.

'Dearest,—In case I am not back when you return I write to tell you that I am going to Jean Durand's house—you know where it is better than I. His little boy is very ill. I go to try and make things comfortable for him—come and fetch me. Thine—

'VIRGINIE.

Tired with travelling, what husband would not be vexed at having to go out on such an errand? He had to wake the people of the stables, to get a horse saddled, and, worn out as he was, ride forth in the night to fetch his wife.

But when he now heard her story, told with sweet simplicity, he gazed at Virginie with wonder and admiration. He forgot the scolding he had prepared as he rode along, and all the sage counsel he was prepared to give on the eccentricity of her conduct. He only saw the charity and kind simplicity of this good woman whom he called his wife. And as, in the pride of his honest admiration, he stooped and kissed her forehead, Virginie felt a tear drop on her upturned face.

‘Do you forgive me, Etienne?’ she asked. ‘It was very inconsiderate of me to ask you to come to fetch me after your long drive.’

‘Forgive!’ he cried, with emotion. ‘It is I who ought to ask for forgiveness, for having, for one moment, misjudged so noble a woman. Had there been many like you in the land, it would not be, as it is now, torn by dissension and anarchy. And how goes your little patient?’

Virginie led him to the door of the hovel where Jean had been waiting for her.

‘My good man,’ said the Comte softly, for he saw the father’s glance, and understood his anxiety lest his boy should be disturbed, ‘madame has told me your story. It depends on yourself whether you choose to continue the life you have hitherto led. You know Joseph, one of my woodmen, has been incapacitated by rheumatism from work. His house and place are vacant, will you take them?’

Jean was thunderstruck. ‘Ah, M. le Comte,’ he cried, ‘had I met you before I should not be what I am now,’ and he passed his rough sleeve across his eyes.

‘It is never too late,’ said La Beauce kindly. ‘You can turn over a new leaf, and, depend upon it, while you are with me and among my people, you need never fear the past so long as you can show a blameless present.’

At that moment the Mère Durand appeared at the door, and anxiously whispered to Virginie that the little one was awake, and asking for his angel. ‘It is thus he calls madame,’ she explained to La Beauce. Virginie at once entered the house and

left the two men together. The little sufferer was again soothed, and, under the influence of another dose, sank once more into a sound sleep.

Now Jean’s tongue was loosed. Leading the Comte a little further from the house, that their talk might not disturb the patient, he began—

'Monseigneur, before doing this good action you ought to know what sort of a man you would benefit. I am Jean Durand, a convicted poacher, one of those unfortunate men to whom few would care to be seen speaking. I am an outcast for whom no one has pity. I have been publicly whipped, and bear the brand of Monseigneur le Marquis de Boissec, your noble cousin, on my shoulder.' He spoke this bitterly, with set teeth. 'Consider then, Monseigneur,' he continued, in a softened voice. 'If you would recall your generous offer, do so. I shall think none the worse of you, but shall still bless you, and your noble lady, for the kindness you have shown us.'

There was something so straightforward and honest in the man's words, something so manly in his self-accusation, that the Comte was much touched.

'I know you better than you think,' he said. 'I remember hearing of my cousin the Marquis de Boissec's conduct to you, some years ago, and even then thought it was brutal in the extreme.'

'And it has been punished,' interrupted Durand. 'See you that glow in the sky? That is not the coming dawn, but the reflection of the flames that rise from what was the Château de Boissec,' and he pointed, with a weird gesture of his arm, to the sky in the direction of Boissec, which was all reddened with a lurid glare.

'What!' cried the Comte; 'I had hoped this part of France would have escaped these excesses.'

'Are the seigneurs here so much better than those of the Beaujolais and Maconnais?' asked Durand.

'This is horrible!' cried La Beauce.

'Monseigneur had better withdraw his offer,' said Durand, calmly.

'No,' answered the Comte. 'I do not believe you could be guilty of such a cowardice. You, who are so devoted to your own child, would never have the heart to burn the roof over the heads of innocent women and children!'

'I was to have led the party to-night,' said Durand, in a low

voice, 'and, had I not met Madame la Comtesse and seen how good she was, I should have done this deed without a thought of pity. Ah, monseigneur, you cannot tell of what a starving and desperate man is capable.'

'My friend,' said La Beauce, 'you are better than you make yourself out to be. I renew my offer.'

Durand paused a minute, then he said softly:—

‘You shall never repent it, I call God to witness,’ and he raised his hand solemnly towards heaven. At that moment a star fell with long trail of light, right through the lurid sky in the direction of Boisseac, as if the oath were registered on high. The Comte turned to the reddening glare.

‘Can nothing be done to help these people?’

‘Nothing, monseigneur; there are three or four hundred half-famished people now round those flames. It is the judgment of God.’

They watched the increasing light in the sky for some minutes in silence; then Durand spoke.

‘Monsieur, it would be better for you to take madame home. There will be many people in the woods after this wild work, and when they leave the château, the ways may not be safe for such as you.’

And he entered the house.

Virginie was not easily persuaded to quit her little patient, but he was sleeping so peacefully that at last she consented, leaving many directions for his further treatment, and bidding the mother assure Petit Jean that she would come soon to see him again. Jean had meanwhile saddled her pony, her husband helped her to mount, and escorted by Jean they commenced their homeward journey.

The dawn was just beginning to show itself, the rosy tints of God’s morning contrasting with the lurid colour that marked the vengeance of man. Virginie was too much fatigued, with want of sleep, to notice anything unusual in the sky, nor did either the Comte or Jean care to frighten her by telling her what had happened. She inquired languidly for news of Célimène, and when her husband told her that there was no change for the better, and that Madame de la Rosière was rapidly sinking, she lapsed into silence, having indeed much trouble to keep awake. Soon they reached a bridle-path, where Jean halted, saying that he must return to Petit Jean, who might require his help. La Beauce bade him be of good cheer, assuring him that things would go well with him now, and Virginie roused herself to send a further message to her little charge. The Comte then seized the reins of his wife’s pony and hurried her on, leaving Jean standing gazing after them till they disappeared. He then with a sigh of relief drew his slouch hat over his brow, and trudged back to his house.

Neither La Beauce nor his wife spoke much on their way home. The morning was bright and clear, the air of dawn fresh and bracing, and the dew on the leaves and grass sparkled in the first rays of the rising sun as they alighted at the Château. The world looked very beautiful and innocent at that early hour. The great sun had put out the lurid light of the incendiary fire, changing its glow to a cloud of murky smoke. Was it possible they could be so peaceable and quiet while within a few miles crime and folly were rampant? As the Comte de la Beauce looked at his paternal mansion, with its great range of stables and farm-buildings—at the home he loved so well—he trembled to think that perhaps he too might some day see all this in flames. He said nothing, however, to Virginie, who needed his strong arm to help her to alight, and aid her up the steps of the *façade* to her room. The sleepy lacquey, who opened the door, had a dissipated and dishevelled look which contrasted with the clear, clean dawn outside. And even Louison, who quickly appeared, was less dapper and neat than usual. ‘What, madame, you have returned!’ she said; ‘Heaven grant this folly have no evil consequences to your health!’

But the Comte bade her aid her tired mistress to her bed, and, although she talked incessantly during the process of undressing Virginie, that good lady was far too fatigued to give her any of the information she was dying to acquire, and was no sooner in bed than she sank into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEQUEL.

VIRGINIE was late the next morning. She awoke with a confused sensation, the events of the day before being somehow mixed up with her dreams, and partaking so much of a dreamlike character as to lose all their reality. As she dressed she recalled the scene in the poor hovel. Petit Jean reappeared to her with strange vividness, holding out his poor thin arms and calling for his angel. So much was she absorbed in her thoughts, that she was decidedly short and monosyllabic with Louison, who thereupon put on the air of an injured martyr, becoming to the circumstances.

Descending to her boudoir she inquired for her husband. The Comte had been out since early morning, the servant said, but he

was to be expected at the *déjeuner* which took place usually at eleven. Virginie employed her time in putting together another hamper of good things for her little patient, for she determined to start for Jean Durand's house as soon as she had seen her husband.

La Beauce on his appearance wore a grave expression : he had been out to ascertain news of this incendiarism at the Château de Boissec. At first he had been able to learn very little. The inhabitants of the village of La Beauce were all his tenants, and were far too well off and comfortable to trouble themselves about, or to engage in, such desperate affairs, in spite of the dearness of food and the comparative failure of the crops. There was, however, a rumour that the men on the neighbouring estate and on several near had been on the move the night before. Large parties had been met on the roads all going the same way, evidently by a concerted arrangement. Those who met them had been enticed to join, and even threatened if they did not. At length La Beauce found one man, a workman on one of his farms, who had been forced to accompany the rioters.

'See you, M. le Comte,' he said; 'I had been into Courville to see Annette—she to whom I am to be married—and, coming back, I overtook a band of men with blackened faces, who stopped me. One with a lantern put it to my face.

"It is Charles Benet from La Beauce," he said, and I seemed to know his voice.

"He must come with us, then," said another, who, I am certain, was Gomerot, the blacksmith, from Plessis-sur-Eure. M. le Comte, what could I do? I had to go, for they were more than fifty, and I alone. So we trudged on through the night till we came to the château, where we found a great crowd who were battering in the gates. These were soon broken down. I saw that great devil Gomerot smashing in the lock. Some rushed on the *métairie*, and soon all the stacks and buildings were on fire; others, and they were a large band, marched straight to the great door and called for M. le Marquis. Then M. Dupont, the steward, came forward and cried out that M. le Marquis was not there; that he had fled to Chartres where Madame was staying, and many shouted, "So much the better for him!" and many ugly names they gave him, monsieur.

'Then they seized M. Dupont, and I thought they would have killed him—but no. They made him order out several great casks of wine, which the servants brought out, looking the while as

white as the coats of their liveries. There was raised a great cry, "All must leave the house!" and the servants and maids came trooping out, frightened enough, poor things! Then they cried—"Where is Jean Durand?" "Room for Jean Durand!" and there was a pause. But Gomerot came forward and said something I could not quite hear, after which there was much consulting amongst the leaders, and I heard them curse Durand as a traitor and coward. And someone, I think it was Gomerot, cried, "Never mind, as Jean Durand shows the white feather, let us make M. Dupont do his work," and they brought a quantity of straw and piled it in the hall, and forced poor M. Dupont to set fire to the pile. Fiercely it burnt, leaping through the windows and licking up the woodwork with great tongues of fire. And the men danced and sang and drank the while; and laughed when they heard the poor cows bellowing with fear and the horses mad with terror in the stables. But some with more heart led most of the beasts out, and they galloped wildly about and disappeared into the darkness. Then I, being very frightened, managed to steal away in the confusion, and ran so hard home that I have not yet recovered.'

The Comte de la Beauce therefore had good reason to look grave, and, when Virginie proposed going at once to the place they had visited the night before, strove to dissuade her. He told her of the burning of Boissec, and pointed out that the woods might still be full of these dangerous rioters. But Virginie was all the more anxious to carry assistance to the poor family she had taken under her protection, and her husband at last yielded, only stipulating that they should be accompanied by a guard of half a dozen of his servants duly armed. In truth he himself was somewhat alarmed for the safety of Durand, whose refusal to join in the burning of Boissec had evidently angered his former friends.

Having gathered his little band together they set forth about midday for Jean's hut. The day was very fine, and in the heat of the August noon the woods were all silent and still. La Beauce strove to engage Virginie's attention by telling her of his visit to Chartres: how his poor aunt could not be expected to live many days longer; how poor Célimène had cried on receiving Virginie's letter; and how he looked forward to her coming to the Château and keeping up the friendship to which he owed so much. Virginie said but little in reply. Her thoughts wandered off to the old convent—to her eleven years of youth spent there and to

her dear aunt—then her last moments came to her mind and her solemn advice. Well! she had found the good man to whom she could devote herself, and, please God, she would always love him even as her aunt had predicted. So they rode on gently on account of the heat, the six servants following.

But as they drew near their destination they smelt burning. Strange that the wind should have brought the smoke of Boisseac thus far. Stronger and stronger grew the smell, till they reached the clearing in which stood Jean Durand's house. Could they believe their eyes? There was no house there now! The thatched roof covered with weeds and moss was there no longer—only blackened ruins. Virginie gave a cry of horror, and was so overcome that the Comte had to hold her on to her pony. All that remained of this poor home was the wall on the side of the chimney which was no doubt supported by the additional brickwork, and the angle where stood the little bed, in which she had left Petit Jean, itself sadly discoloured and blackened by the flames. But the bed-place caught Virginie's eye. 'Quick, Etienne!' she cried; 'the child! Petit Jean, in the bed. Look! look!'

La Beauce leaped from his horse and lifted Virginie from hers. Leaving her to the care of the servants, he ran to the smoking ruins. What hope was there? He dashed through the charred fragments of the fallen roof, his heavy riding-boots protecting his feet, towards the bed-place, Virginie watching every movement with intense interest. Suddenly he stopped and uttered a cry of horror.

'What is it?' she shouted.

He stooped and examined something. 'Nothing,' he answered hastily. It was the charred remains of the poor mother, who had fallen and met her death by the side of her little one. And now he gained the bed-place—the blankets, Virginie's gift, were hardly singed. He lifted them and took forth the poor little form of Petit Jean.

'Does he live?' cried Virginie in horror.

Alas, the poor head fell on the thin shoulder powerless. 'He is not burnt,' shouted La Beauce as he bore the senseless body from the ruins.

Virginie rushed forward to meet her husband, who, assisted by the servants, crept out of the ruined cabin. 'Back! it is too horrible for you to see,' cried he, as he carried Petit Jean clear of the little garden.

'The child! Is he dead? He cannot be dead,' repeated Virginie in agony.

La Beauce having placed the little body reverently on the ground, Virginie dropped on her knees beside it to feel whether there was any chance of life. It was quite cold, the heart was still. Petit Jean lay there dead, stifled by the smoke, though untouched by the flame. And in death he seemed to smile at the woman leaning over him, whom but a few hours before he had called his angel!

Virginie kissed the poor pale face and rubbed the cold hands. Alas, what use was that? Petit Jean would never move again. It was pitiable to see so young a face so fixed and immovable, to think of one just starting in life stopped by the hand of death—and death from what? Was it chance or the hand of man that had wrought this destruction? Standing by the side of Virginie and watching her with this murdered innocent, La Beauce muttered in his teeth, 'The cowards!'

Meanwhile the servants had been searching the ruins; they, too, quickly found the body of the mother; but La Beauce, who now joined them, covered up the poor remains with one of Petit Jean's blankets, lest Virginie should catch sight of these terrible suggestions of humanity. Where could the father be? He who was so devoted to his child, was he not there to share their peril? No, there was no trace of him in the house. At length one of the men, searching in what had been the garden, in which now this autumn time grew a mixed wilderness of weeds and vegetables fast running to seed, shouted, 'Monseigneur, he is here; ' then, stooping down, he added, 'Quick! quick! he lives!'

At this cry they all hurried to the spot, and even Virginie, leaving the body of the child, ran forward. There was Jean Durand lying senseless, and covered with blood! Strange to say he was not burnt, for though the flames had reached some part of the garden, it had not touched the spot where he lay, which was in the extremity of the plot, next the path that led to Boissec.

They raised him and carried him to a more open spot, and examined him with care. His right arm was broken and his head a mass of bruises and clotted gore; but as La Beauce bathed these wounds he gave a faint groan. Quickly the basket, with the good things brought for Petit Jean, was opened, and some cognac poured down the poor fellow's throat. He groaned again and his lips moved. Virginie bending over him fancied she heard the words 'Petit Jean,' but it was possibly her overwrought

imagination that made her imagine this, for his eyes closed again and he seemed senseless.

They did what they could for the poor fellow. They bathed and staunched the wounds on his head, from which the blood now began to flow; they made a rough splint for his broken arm. Then they put together a litter of boughs on which they stretched his battered form. By its side Virginie herself placed the little body of the dead child, and bade them carry both to the Château. Leaving the servants to follow slowly with their burden, Virginie and her husband trotted on home to prepare for their reception, and to send off for the nearest doctor living at Courville.

Jean had been undressed and put into a comfortable bed, and Virginie was watching by its side when the doctor arrived. A rough man was this country doctor, but not without skill. He examined the wounds with care and shook his head.

'A bad case, madame!' he said, 'a case which some of my learned confrères would at once say was hopeless. I know these people better, and, *ma foi*, what would kill anyone else, they sometimes manage to survive. With care and good nursing, to which I should say he was unused, there is no saying what might not happen.' The doctor looked at the careworn face, gaunt and haggard from want, now pale and bloodless, at the matted unkempt beard, at the rough hands, and then glanced at the beautiful and delicate lady standing by the side of the bed, and wondered. During his practice he had seen many odd things, but none like this.

'If it is not a rude question, madame,' he said after a pause, 'might I ask where on earth did you find this rough specimen of humanity?'

Virginie told her story. The doctor looked at her with still greater astonishment.

'What, madame!' he exclaimed, 'you went alone to such a man's hut!'

'Why not?' asked Virginie simply; 'was there any harm in doing so?'

'Do you not know, my dear madame, that these people are all in revolt? That the Château de Boisseac was burnt last night, and that it is hardly safe, even for me, to ride through the country?'

'Then,' said Virginie, 'possibly these misguided people were the perpetrators of this cruel deed.'

The doctor took a long pinch of snuff. 'Misguided?' he

said with astonishment. 'Madame is then on the side of the people?'

'I am on the side of all who are downtrodden, miserable, and starving!'

The doctor, like many of his profession, was a revolutionist. He took Virginie's hand and kissed it respectfully.

'Madame,' he said, 'I respect your deeds even more than your words; with such a nurse our patient must recover.' He then dressed poor Jean's wounds with tenderness and skill, and left directions as to further treatment, promising another visit next day.

Virginie's adventure added greatly to her popularity. That one of her class should not only succour one of the people, but should have the case removed to her own house, and look after the patient herself, seemed incomprehensible, even to the tenants of the Comte de la Beauce, who were accustomed to kindness. There was quite an excitement among the tenants of the estate at the funeral that took place two days after, when the mortal remains of the poor child and the charred fragments of the mother were buried in the little church of the village. Virginie and her husband were both present, acting as chief mourners, and both were much impressed at the scene and the respectful conduct of the crowd during the ceremony. Nor did the Abbé Leroux neglect to improve the occasion. He delivered an appropriate address, pointing out the hideous results of popular impatience, and the ease with which discontent developed into crime.

The auditors were deeply moved, many, even among the men, shed tears.

Every head was bared as the Comte and Comtesse de la Beauce passed through the churchyard on their way home, and not a few called down blessings on the pair.

Virginie herself gave directions for a small cross to be raised over the grave of Petit Jean and his mother, recording their names and the date of their death, and adding the simple words, 'Pray for them; they were cut off before their time by the inhumanity of their fellow-men.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PRESENTATION.

ON the evening of the funeral of Petit Jean, while the Comte and his wife were strolling on the terrace of the Château, which commanded a magnificent view of the country, they became aware of crowds of men approaching the house. Somewhat alarmed, they paused on the corner of the terrace overlooking the road, which, making a *détour* round the house and garden, joined the main road running up the avenue towards Chartres. On came the men, sometimes by twos and threes, sometimes in greater numbers, all clad in their holiday attire and all going the same way. But when they recognised their landlord, each man raised his hat, and some as they passed out of sight turned and cheered. Reassured by the respect shown them, they yet marvelled what it could mean. Towards evening, however, the Comte and Virginie were mysteriously summoned by the steward of the household to the courtyard.

‘What is it you want?’ asked Virginie, alarmed.

‘Madame need be under no apprehension,’ said the steward, with a smile; ‘but if Madame and Monsieur le Comte will deign to come to the door, I will answer for it they will be pleased by what they will see.’

La Beauce, without further inquiries, gave his arm to Virginie and led her to the front door, where, on passing out on the landing of the steps leading from the courtyard, they found a vast crowd of people, who saluted them with loud cries and waving of hats. In front were the Abbé, the intendant or agent of the property, and two of the largest tenants. The crowd was composed of the tenants and labourers on the estate. Amid a general clapping of hands the Abbé led forward the two tenants. Hat in hand they ascended the steps, and stood on the landing on the top in the sight of their neighbours and friends. Then a strange bashfulness seemed to come over them. ‘Well,’ cried the Abbé, ‘have you nothing to say, Le Grand?’ Le Grand, who was an old man with long white hair, turned his hat round awkwardly in his hands, with his eyes fixed on the lining, as if he were seeking inspiration from the black felt. Then he looked up and opened his lips, but no sound came. At length, clearing his throat, he began with a bow, ‘Monsieur le Comte—Monsieur le Comte.’ There was a

pause and a bright idea came upon him. 'And Madame la Comtesse,' he added, bowing with a sweep of his hat to Virginie. Then he coughed, as though very satisfied with himself. La Beauce and Virginie smiled encouragingly. He could find nothing more. The crowd cheered and clapped their hands. No, nothing more came. At last with a mighty effort he blurted out, with another sway of his hat, 'Voilà Poirier,' and he stepped back to make way for his colleague.

Poirier was a stout, choleric-looking man of middle age. He squared his shoulders and pressed his hat to his heart. He was clad in the blue coat that had so incensed the Abbé, and seemed prepared for the occasion. 'Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse,' he began with great glibness. Then he too stopped and gazed vacantly at the crowd and then at Virginie. In vain he tried to moisten his lips, nothing could he bring out but 'Voilà Le Grand.'

The crowd seemed to enjoy the confusion of these two men. They cheered vociferously, but some laughed. Whereupon Poirier, turning angrily to them, cried, 'Come you up here and see whether it is easy.' At which there was a general cheer. But the Abbé now stepped forward and said :—

'Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse, these two worthy fellows appear as representatives of your tenants and neighbours here assembled, being deputed by them to wish you all health and happiness. They desire to assure you of their respect and esteem, and to tell you that they deplore the excesses committed on some of the neighbouring properties, excesses which they have been unable to prevent. But on this property they have determined to preserve order at all costs. They therefore of their own accord, and without a hint either from me or M. l'Intendant, who indeed were both ignorant of this gathering, have met together and arranged that guard shall be kept round your château, and signals have been agreed upon by means of which they can all be summoned, if occasion should require it, to act in your defence. For, M. le Comte, their affection for you, whom they have known from boyhood, is only equalled by the esteem with which they regard the lady whom you have brought among them as their Comtesse. She has been among us but a short time, yet by her kindness and generosity she has gained the hearts of us all, so that there is not one of us here assembled—and be assured every able-bodied man on the property is here—who would not willingly sacrifice his life for her safety.'

'Is that not what you would have said?' he asked, turning to the old farmer.

'Why ask me,' said Poirier testily, 'when you know it is?'

'And the tree!' gasped Le Grand with an effort.

'I come to that,' continued the Abbé. 'With your permission, then, M. le Comte, they wish to plant a "Mai," or tree of liberty, as a token of the affection they bear you both, and a pledge that their part of the trust will be performed.'

'How he speaks!' cried the delighted Le Grand, who had followed each word, as it fell from the lips of the Abbé, with an appropriate gesture of his arm.

'As I would myself have spoken could I have begun,' grumbled the irritable Poirier, whose heart beat with rage against his over-tight coat, as he felt that he had lost in the estimation of his neighbours by his want of eloquence. For Poirier in private life was a great speaker, and no one more than himself was surprised at his entire inability to speak in public. Nay, in after years he sometimes alluded to the speech he had made at the planting of the 'Mai' at the Château de la Beauce with considerable complaisance, nor, as he was known to be choleric, were any of his neighbours bold enough to contradict him. So in that part of France it got to be a proverb, '*Beau comme le discours de Poirier*,' meaning something that existed in the imagination only.

The little speech of the Abbé was enthusiastically received by the crowd, and at its conclusion all waved their hats and shouted. The setting sun struck its rays across the scene, gilding the long range of farm-buildings and the upturned faces of the peasants, who, as La Beauce came forward to express his thanks, shouted '*Vive Monsieur le Comte!*' with redoubled vigour.

'My good friends and neighbours,' said the Comte, 'you have this day made me very happy. You have shown me that my affection for you has not been misplaced, and, by your spontaneous expression of good wishes towards myself and Madame, you have laid a debt of gratitude on us which we shall find it difficult to discharge. Believe me, it will be a great pleasure to us to acknowledge that obligation, and we shall strive to repay it by any services we can render.'

'You are all aware that we have been ourselves witness of a terrible outrage, which has already resulted in the deaths of two innocent persons, a woman and a sick child, and the possible death of another who is now here. That such a thing should happen in France is much to be deplored, but that it should

happen here in our own neighbourhood is a disgrace which I feel as keenly as anyone. In the cause of law and order I am ever ready to act, and, when you offer yourselves as a protection to me and mine, I accept readily, for I hope you will believe that I am willing to do the same to my utmost ability to any of you.' Here the applause was tremendous. 'For,' continued the Comte, commanding silence with a gesture of his hand, 'we are bound together not only by bonds of interest, but also by those ties of affection and respect which have grown during the many years I have lived among you, and I trust will become more firm the more we see our neighbours disagreeing. To my mind the safety and welfare of this France we all love so well is bound up in the safety of each individual, the mutual respect and consideration displayed between the proprietor and the tenant, and the love and helpfulness of one to the other, irrespective of class.

'You have, in the address delivered by my friend here, alluded to the lady I have brought among you. Since she has been here you have learnt to know her and to love her. Be assured I shall not be jealous of that love, and that my affection for her is, if possible, increased since I have found how admirably she has discharged her duties, and seconded my efforts for your good. I will not commence her praises, for I should weary you before I had half said what I wished.

'In conclusion I shall be proud if you would plant your "Mai" in the centre of this courtyard, that, to my descendants, it may stand as a testimony of the mutual confidence between us.'

The Comte's speech was greatly cheered, but the ceremony was not over, for Le Grand and Poirier, after much whispering, produced a large sheet of paper on which was written an address, which had been signed, or witnessed by mark, by all the tenants.

La Beauce took it, and said he should guard it with the archives of his family, and giving his hand to Virginie led her down among the crowd, where the operations of saluting and shaking hands were duly performed. Meanwhile some of the younger tenants were seen dragging a tree to the centre of the courtyard, while some others quickly set to work digging a hole for its reception. Barrels of the country wine were brought out by the household, and the evening closed with the drinking of the healths of the Seigneur and his wife.

Jean Durand was all this time struggling for life. For many hours he had not stirred. So still he remained that, at times, they thought he had passed away. Now, strange to say, at the

mighty shout which saluted the raising of the 'Mai' to its proper position, and which it was feared would have had an evil effect upon him, he opened his eyes. He glanced round the room and began muttering. Then his voice gradually gained strength.

'No,' he cried in broken words, 'never—never—Gomerot—Ah, traitor! Petit Jean, spare Petit Jean!—cowards all at once! Fire—fire—put it out—ah!' and he sank back exhausted.

The watcher by the bedside gave him some few drops of restorative and changed the cool cloths round his sorely battered head. He lay still again with terrible deathlike immobility.

When Virginie came in, after the festivities were over, she was told what had happened. She leant over the poor powerless creature and listened for his breath. At that moment Jean reopened his eyes.

'The angel!' he cried, and he raised his arm that was yet whole. 'The angel—come for Petit Jean! Ah, I shall not go—no—not there—never again—never see my child—horrible!' and such a look of despair came to his face that Virginie was frightened.

She placed her hand on his. 'Jean,' she said, 'be brave.'

'Ah—who is it? I cannot see well. Ah, Madame, look to Petit Jean when I am gone.'

'Courage,' said Virginie again, 'courage, Jean! I am here quite near you. Keep quite still and strive not to excite yourself and you will live.'

'And Petit Jean,' murmured the sick man, 'where is Petit Jean?'

'It is well with Petit Jean now,' said Virginie softly. 'He would wish you to live if he were here.'

With a mighty effort the poor fellow raised his hand on which her sympathetic fingers were resting to his lips. But he sank back exhausted by the effort.

From that time Jean began to mend; not that he progressed steadily, far from it. Many days of delirium and fever he went through, during which those who watched him almost lost hope. And often and often he enacted the scene of the burning of his house and the assault on himself, which scene never varied, and always was the catastrophe the result of his refusal to do something which was asked him. But, though weakened by these attacks, they gradually became less frequent and less severe. So he went on for several weeks, constantly visited by Virginie, whose presence seemed to act like magic upon him,

(*To be continued.*)

Music and Dancing in Nature.

IN reading books of Natural History we meet with numerous instances of birds possessing the habit of assembling together, in many cases always at the same spot, to indulge in antics and dancing performances, with or without the accompaniment of music, vocal or instrumental: and by instrumental music are here meant all sounds other than vocal made habitually and during the more or less orderly performances; as, for instance, drumming and tapping noises, smiting of wings, and humming, whip-cracking, fan-shutting, grinding, scraping, and horn-blowing sounds, produced as a rule by the quills.

There are human dances in which only one person performs at a time, the rest of the company looking on; and some birds, in widely separated genera, have dances of this kind. A striking example is the *Rupicola*, or cock-of-the-rock, of tropical South America. A mossy level spot of earth surrounded by bushes is selected for a dancing-place, and kept well cleared of sticks and stones; round this area the birds assemble, when a cock-bird, with vivid orange-scarlet crest and plumage, steps into it, and, with spreading wings and tail, begins a series of movements as if dancing a minuet; finally, carried away with excitement, he leaps and gyrates in the most astonishing manner, until, becoming exhausted, he retires and another bird takes his place.

In other species all the birds in a company unite in the set performances, and seem to obey an impulse which affects them simultaneously and in the same degree; but sometimes one bird prompts the others and takes a principal part. One of the most curious instances I have come across in reading is contained in Mr. Bigg-Wither's *Pioneering in South Brazil*. He relates that one morning in the dense forest his attention was roused by the unwonted sound of a bird singing—songsters being rare in that district. His men, immediately they caught the sound, invited

him to follow them, hinting that he would probably witness a very curious sight. Cautiously making their way through the dense undergrowth, they finally came in sight of a small stony spot of ground, at the end of a tiny glade; and on this spot, some on the stone and some on the shrubs, were assembled a number of little birds, about the size of tom-tits, with lovely blue plumage and red top-knots. One was perched quite still on a twig, singing merrily, while the others were keeping time with wings and feet in a kind of dance, and all twittering an accompaniment. He watched them for some time and was satisfied that they were having a ball and concert and thoroughly enjoying themselves; they then became alarmed, and the performance abruptly terminated, the birds all going off in different directions. The natives told him that these little creatures were known as the 'dancing birds.'

This species was probably solitary, except when assembling for the purpose of display; but in a majority of cases, especially in the Passerine order, the solitary species performs its antics alone, or with no witness but its mate. Azara, describing a small finch, which he aptly named *Oscilador*, says that early and late in the day it mounts up vertically to a moderate height; then flies off to a distance of twenty yards, describing a perfect curve in its passage, then, turning, it flies back over the imaginary line it has traced, and so on repeatedly, appearing like a pendulum swung in space by an invisible thread.

Those who seek to know the cause and origin of this kind of display and of song in animals are referred to Darwin's *Descent of Man* for an explanation. The greater part of that work is occupied with a laborious argument intended to prove that the love-feeling inspires the animals engaged in these exhibitions, and that sexual selection, or the voluntary selection of mates by the females, is the final cause of all set musical and dancing performances, as well as of bright and harmonious colouring, and of ornaments.

The theory, with regard to birds, is that in the love-season, when the males are excited and engage in courtship, the females do not fall to the strongest and most active, nor to those that are first in the field; but that they are endowed with a faculty corresponding to the æsthetic feeling or taste in man, and deliberately select males for their superiority in some æsthetic quality, such as graceful or fantastic motions, melody of voice, brilliancy of colour, or perfection of ornaments. Doubtless all birds were originally

plain-coloured, without ornaments and without melody, and it is assumed that so it would always have been but for the action of this principle, which, like natural selection, has gone on accumulating countless small variations, tending to give a greater lustre to the species in each case, and resulting in all that we most admire in the animal world—the *Rupicola*'s flame-coloured mantle, the peacock's crest and starry train, the joyous melody of the lark, and the pretty or fantastic dancing performances of birds.

My experience is that mammals and birds, with few exceptions—probably there are really *no* exceptions—possess the habit of indulging frequently in more or less regular or set performances, with or without sound, or composed of sound exclusively; and that these performances, which in many animals are only discordant cries and choruses, and uncouth, irregular motions, in the more ærial, graceful, and melodious kinds take immeasurably higher, more complex, and more beautiful forms. Among the mammals the instinct appears almost universal; but their displays are, as a rule, less admirable than those seen in birds. There are some kinds, it is true, like the squirrels and monkeys, of arboreal habits, almost birdlike in their restless energy and in the swift-ness and certitude of their motions, in which the slightest impulse can be instantly expressed in graceful or fantastic action; others, like the *Chinchillidæ* family, have greatly developed vocal organs, and resemble birds in loquacity; but mammals generally, compared with birds, are slow and heavy, and not so readily moved to exhibitions of the kind I am discussing.

The terrestrial dances, often very elaborate, of heavy birds, like those of the gallinaceous kind, are represented in the more volatile species by performances in the air, and these are very much more beautiful; while a very large number of birds—hawks, vultures, swifts, swallows, nightjars, storks, ibises, spoon-bills, and gulls—circle about in the air, singly or in flocks. Sometimes, in serene weather, they rise to a vast altitude, and float about in one spot for an hour or longer at a stretch, showing a faint bird-cloud in the blue, that does not change its form nor grow lighter and denser like a flock of starlings; but in the seeming confusion there is perfect order, and amidst many hundreds each swift- or slow-gliding figure keeps its proper distance with such exactitude that no two ever touch, even with the extremity of the long wings, flapping or motionless:—such a multitude, and such miraculous precision in the endless curving motions of all the members of it, that the spectator can lie for an

hour on his back without weariness watching this mystic cloud-dance in the empyrean.

The black-faced ibis of Patagonia, a bird nearly as large as a turkey, indulges in a curious mad performance, usually in the evening when feeding-time is over. The birds of a flock, while winging their way to the roosting-place, all at once seem possessed with frenzy, simultaneously dashing downwards with amazing violence, doubling about in the most eccentric manner, and when close to the surface rising again to repeat the action, all the while making the air palpitate for miles around with their hard, metallic cries. Other ibises, also birds of other genera, have similar aerial performances.

The displays of most ducks known to me take the form of mock fights on the water; one exception is the handsome and loquacious whistling widgeon of La Plata, which has a pretty aerial performance. A dozen or twenty birds rise up until they appear like small specks in the sky, and sometimes disappear from sight altogether; and at that great altitude they continue hovering in one spot, often for an hour or longer, alternately closing and separating, the fine, bright, whistling notes and flourishes of the male curiously harmonising with the grave, measured notes of the female; and every time they close they slap each other on the wings so smartly that the sound can be distinctly heard, like applauding hand-claps, even after the birds have ceased to be visible.

The rails, active, sprightly birds with powerful and varied voices, are great performers; but, owing to the nature of the ground they inhabit and to their shy, suspicious character, it is not easy to observe their antics. The finest of the Platan rails is the ypecaha, a beautiful, active bird about the size of the fowl. A number of ypecahas have their assembling-place on a small area of smooth, level ground, just above the water, and hemmed in by dense rush-beds. First, one bird among the rushes emits a powerful cry, thrice repeated; and this is a note of invitation, quickly responded to by other birds from all sides as they hurriedly repair to the usual place. In a few moments they appear, to the number of a dozen or twenty, bursting from the rushes and running into the open space, and instantly beginning the performance. This is a tremendous screaming concert. The screams they utter have a certain resemblance to the human voice, exerted to its utmost pitch and expression of extreme terror, frenzy, and despair. A long, piercing shriek, astonishing for its vehemence

and power, is succeeded by a lower note, as if in the first the creature had well-nigh exhausted itself; this double scream is repeated several times, and followed by other sounds, resembling, as they rise and fall, half-smothered cries of pain and moans of anguish. Suddenly the unearthly shrieks are renewed in all their power. While screaming the birds rush from side to side, as if possessed with madness, the wings spread and vibrating, the long beak wide open and raised vertically. This exhibition lasts three or four minutes, after which the assembly peacefully breaks up.

The singular wattled, wing-spurred, and long-toed jacana has a remarkable performance, which seems specially designed to bring out the concealed beauty of the silky, greenish-golden wing-quills. The birds go singly or in pairs, and a dozen or fifteen individuals may be found in a marshy place feeding within sight of each other. Occasionally, in response to a note of invitation, they all in a moment leave off feeding and fly to one spot, and, forming a close cluster, and emitting short, excited, rapidly repeated notes, display their wings, like beautiful flags grouped loosely together: some hold the wings up vertically and motionless; others, half open and vibrating rapidly, while still others wave them up and down with a slow, measured motion.

In the ypecaha and jacana displays both sexes take part. A stranger performance is that of the spur-winged lapwing of the same region—a species resembling the lapwing of Europe, but a third larger, brighter coloured, and armed with spurs. The lapwing display, called by the natives its ‘dance,’ or ‘serious dance’—by which they mean square dance—requires three birds for its performance, and is, so far as I know, unique in this respect. The birds are so fond of it that they indulge in it all the year round, and at frequent intervals during the day, also on moonlight nights. If a person watches any two birds for some time—for they live in pairs—he will see another lapwing, one of a neighbouring couple, rise up and fly to them, leaving his own mate to guard their chosen ground; and instead of resenting this visit as an unwarranted intrusion on their domain, as they would certainly resent the approach of almost any other bird, they welcome it with notes and signs of pleasure. Advancing to the visitor, they place themselves behind it; then all three, keeping step, begin a rapid march, uttering resonant drumming notes in time with their movements; the notes of the pair behind

being emitted in a stream, like a drum-roll, while the leader utters loud single notes at regular intervals. The march ceases; the leader elevates his wings and stands erect and motionless, still uttering loud notes; while the other two, with puffed-out plumage and standing exactly abreast, stoop forward and downward until the tips of their beaks touch the ground, and, sinking their rhythmical voices to a murmur, remain for some time in this posture. The performance is then over and the visitor goes back to his own ground and mate, to receive a visitor himself later on.

In the Passerine order, not the least remarkable displays are witnessed in birds that are not accounted songsters, as they do not possess the highly developed vocal organ confined to the sub-order Oscines. The tyrant-birds, which represent in South America the fly-catchers of the Old World, all have displays of some kind; in a vast majority of cases these are simply joyous, excited duets between male and female, composed of impetuous and more or less confused notes and screams, accompanied with beating of wings and other gestures. In some species choruses take the place of duets, while in others entirely different forms of display have been developed. In one group—*Cnipolegus*—the male indulges in solitary antics, while the silent, modest-coloured female keeps in hiding. Thus, the male of *Cnipolegus Hudsoni*, an intensely black-plumaged species with a concealed white wing-band, takes his stand on a dead twig on the summit of a bush. At intervals he leaves his perch, displaying the intense white on the quills, and producing, as the wings are thrown open and shut alternately, the effect of successive flashes of light. Then suddenly the bird begins revolving in the air about its perch, like a moth wheeling round and close to the flame of a candle, emitting a series of sharp clicks and making a loud humming with the wings. While performing this aerial waltz the black and white on the quills mix, the wings appearing like a grey mist encircling the body. The fantastic dance over, the bird drops suddenly on to its perch again; and, until moved to another display, remains as stiff and motionless as a bird carved out of jet.

The performance of the scissors-tail, another tyrant-bird, is also remarkable. This species is grey and white, with black head and tail and a crocus-yellow crest. On the wing it looks like a large swallow, but with the two outer tail-feathers a foot long. The scissors-tails always live in pairs, but at sunset several pairs assemble, the birds calling excitedly to each other; they then mount upwards, like rockets, to a great height in the air, and after

wheeling about for a few moments precipitate themselves downwards with amazing violence in a wild zigzag, opening and shutting the long tail-feathers like a pair of shears, and producing loud whirring sounds, as of clocks being wound rapidly up, with a slight pause after each turn of the key. This aerial dance over, they alight in separate couples on the tree-tops, each couple joining in a kind of duet of rapidly-repeated, castanet-like sounds.

The displays of the wood-hewers, or *Dendrocolaptidæ*, another extensive family, resemble those of the tyrant-birds in being chiefly duets, male and female singing excitedly in piercing or resonant voices, and with much action. In some groups these duet-like performances have developed into a kind of harmonious singing, which is very curious and pleasant to hear. This is pre-eminently the case with the oven-birds, as D'Orbigny first remarked. Thus, in the red oven-bird, the first bird, on the appearance of its mate flying to join it, begins to emit loud, measured notes, and sometimes a continuous trill, somewhat metallic in sound; but immediately on the other bird striking in this introductory passage is changed to triplets, strongly accented on the first note, in a *tempo vivace*; while the second bird utters loud single notes in the same time. While thus singing they stand facing each other, necks outstretched and tails expanded, the wings of the first bird vibrating rapidly to the rapid utterance, while those of the second bird beat measured time. The finale consists of three or four notes, uttered by the second bird alone, strong and clear, in an ascending scale, the last very piercing.

In the melodists proper the displays in a majority of cases are exclusively vocal, the singer sitting still on his perch. In the Troupials, a family of starling-like birds numbering about one hundred and forty species, there are many that accompany singing with pretty or grotesque antics. One species, the common cowbird of La Plata, when courting puffs out his glossy rich violet plumage, and, with wings vibrating, emits a succession of deep internal notes, followed by a set song in clear, ringing tones, and then, suddenly taking wing, he flies straight away, close to the surface, fluttering like a moth, and at a distance of twenty to thirty yards turns and flies in a wide circle round the female, singing loudly all the time, hedging her in with melody as it were.

Many songsters in widely different families possess the habit of soaring and falling alternately while singing, and in some cases all the aerial postures and movements, the swift or slow descent, vertical, often with oscillations, or in a spiral, and some-

times with a succession of smooth oblique lapses, seem to have an admirable correspondence with the changing and falling voice—melody and motion being united in a more intimate and beautiful way than in the most perfect and poetic forms of human dancing.

The white-banded mocking-bird of southern South America—perhaps the finest feathered melodist in the world—is one of those species that accompany music with appropriate motions. And just as its song is, so to speak, inspired and an improvisation, unlike any song the bird has ever uttered, so its motions all have the same character of spontaneity, and follow no order, and yet have a grace and passion and a perfect harmony with the music unparalleled among birds possessing a similar habit. While singing he passes from bush to bush, sometimes delaying a few moments on and at others just touching the summits, and at times sinking out of sight in the foliage: then, in an access of rapture, soaring vertically to a height of a hundred feet, with measured wing-beats, like those of a heron: or, mounting suddenly in a wild, hurried zigzag, then slowly circling downwards, to sit at last with tail outspread fanwise, and vans, glistening white in the sunshine, expanded and vibrating, or waved languidly up and down, with a motion like that of some broad-winged butterfly at rest on a flower.

I wish now to put this question: What relation that we can see or imagine to the passion of love and the business of courtship have these dancing and vocal performances in nine cases out of ten? In such cases, for instance, as that of the scissors-tail tyrant-bird, and its pyrotechnic evening displays, when a number of couples leave their nests containing eggs and young to join in a wild aerial dance: the mad exhibitions of ypecabas and ibises, and the jacanas' beautiful exhibition of grouped wings: the triplet dances of the spur-winged lapwing, to perform which two birds already mated are compelled to call in a third bird to complete the set: the harmonious duets of the oven-birds, and the duets and choruses of nearly all the wood-hewers, and the wing-slapping aerial displays of the whistling widgeons;—will it be seriously contended that the female of this species makes choice of the male able to administer the most vigorous and artistic slaps?

The believer in the theory would put all these cases lightly aside, to cite that of the male cow-bird practising antics before the female and drawing a wide circle of melody round her; or that of the jet-black, automaton-like, dancing tyrant-bird; and

concerning this species he would probably say that the plain-plumaged female went about unseen, critically watching the dancing of different males, to discover the most excellent performer according to the traditional standard. And this was, in substance, what Darwin did. There are many species in which the male, singly or with others, practises antics or sings during the love-season before the female; and when all such cases, or rather those that are most striking and bizarre, are brought together, and when it is gratuitously asserted that the females *do* choose the males that show off in the best manner or that sing best, a case for sexual selection seems to be made out. How unfair the argument is, based on these carefully selected cases gathered from all regions of the globe, and often not properly reported, is seen when we turn from the book to nature and closely consider the habits and actions of all the species inhabiting any *one* district. We see then that such cases as those described and made so much of in the *Descent of Man*, and cases like those mentioned in this paper, are not essentially different in character, but are manifestations of one instinct, which appears to be almost universal among the animals. The explanation I have to offer lies very much on the surface, and is very simple indeed, and, like that of Mr. Wallace with regard to colour and ornaments, covers the whole of the facts. We see that the inferior animals, when the conditions of life are favourable, are subject to periodical fits of gladness, affecting them powerfully and standing out in vivid contrast to their ordinary temper. And we know what this feeling is—this periodic intense elation which even civilised man occasionally experiences when in perfect health, more especially when young. There are moments when he is mad with joy, when he cannot keep still, when his impulse is to sing and shout aloud and laugh at nothing, to run and leap and exert himself in some extravagant way. Among the heavier mammals the feeling is manifested in loud noises, bellowings and screamings, and in lumbering, uncouth motions—throwing up of heels, pretended panics, and ponderous mock battles.

In smaller and livelier animals, with greater celerity and certitude in their motions, the feeling shows itself in more regular and often in more complex ways. Thus, Felidæ when young, and, in very agile, sprightly species like the Puma, throughout life, simulate all the actions of an animal hunting its prey—sudden, intense excitement of discovery, concealment, gradual advance, masked by intervening objects, with intervals of watching,

when they crouch motionless, the eyes flashing and tail waved from side to side; finally, the rush and spring, when the play-fellow is captured, rolled over on his back and worried to imaginary death. Other species of the most diverse kinds, in which voice is greatly developed, join in noisy concerts and choruses; many of the cats may be mentioned, also dogs and foxes, capyharas and other loquacious rodents; and in the howling monkeys this kind of performance rises to the sublime uproar of the tropical forest at eventide.

Birds are more subject to this universal joyous instinct than mammals, and there are times when some species are constantly overflowing with it; and as they are so much freer than mammals, more buoyant and graceful in action, more loquacious, and have voices so much finer, their gladness shows itself in a greater variety of ways, with more regular and beautiful motions, and with melody. But every species, or group of species, has its own inherited form or style of performance; and, however rude and irregular this may be, as in the case of the pretended stampedes and fights of wild cattle, that is the form in which the feeling will always be expressed. If all men, at some exceedingly remote period in their history, had agreed to express the common glad impulse, which they now express in such an infinite variety of ways, or do not express at all, by dancing a minuet, and minuet-dancing had at last come to be instinctive, and taken to spontaneously by children at an early period, just as they take to walking 'on their hind legs,' man's case would be like that of the inferior animals.

I was one day watching a flock of plovers, quietly feeding on the ground, when, in a moment, all the birds were seized by a joyous madness, and each one, after making a vigorous peck at his nearest neighbour, began running wildly about, each trying in passing to peck other birds, while seeking by means of quick doublings to escape being pecked in turn. This species always expresses its glad impulse in the same way; but how different in form is this simple game of touch-who-touch-can from the triplet dances of the spur-winged lapwings, with their drumming music, pompous gestures, and military precision of movement! How different also from the aerial performance of another bird of the same family—the Brazilian stilt—in which one is pursued by the others, mounting upwards in a wild, eccentric flight until they are all but lost to view; and back to earth again, and then skywards once more; the pursued bird when overtaken giving place

to another individual, and the pursuing pack making the air ring with their melodious barking cries! How different again are all these from the aerial pastimes of the snipe, in which the bird, in its violent descent, is able to produce such wonderful, far-reaching sounds with its tail-feathers! The snipe, as a rule, is a solitary bird, and, like the oscillating finch mentioned early in this paper, is content to practise its pastimes without a witness. In the gregarious kinds all perform together: for this feeling, like fear, is eminently contagious, and the sight of one bird mad with joy will quickly make the whole flock mad. There are also species that always live in pairs, like the scissors-tails already mentioned, that periodically assemble in numbers for the purpose of display. The crested screamer, a very large bird, may also be mentioned: male and female sing somewhat harmoniously together, with voices of almost unparalleled power: but these birds also congregate in large numbers, and a thousand couples, or even several thousands, may be assembled together: and, at intervals, both by day and night, all sing in concert, their combined voices producing a thunderous melody which seems to shake the earth. As a rule, however, birds that live always in pairs do not assemble for the purpose of display, but the joyous instinct is expressed by duet-like performances between male and female. Thus, in the three South American Passerine families, the tyrant-birds, wood-hewers, and ant-thrushes, numbering together between eight and nine hundred species, a very large majority appear to have displays of this description.

In my own experience, in cases where the male and female together, or assembled with others, take equal parts in the set displays, the sexes are similar, or differ little; but where the female takes no part in the displays the superiority of the male in brightness of colour is very marked. One or two instances bearing on this point may be given.

A scarlet-breasted troupial of La Plata perches conspicuously on a tall plant in a field, and at intervals soars up vertically, singing, and, at the highest ascending point, flight and song end in a kind of aerial somersault and vocal flourish at the same moment. Meanwhile, the dull-plumaged female is not seen and not heard: for not even a skulking crane lives in closer seclusion under the herbage—so widely have the sexes diverged in this species. Is the female, then, without an instinct so common?—has she no sudden fits of irrepressible gladness? Doubtless she has them, and manifests them down in her place of concealment

in lively chirpings and quick motions—the simple, primitive form in which gladness is expressed in the class of birds. In the various species of the genus *Cnipolegus*, already mentioned, the difference in the sexes is just as great as in the case of the troupial: the solitary, intensely black, statuesque male has, we have seen, a set and highly fantastic performance; but on more than one occasion I have seen four or five females of one species meet together and have a little simple performance all to themselves—in form a kind of lively mock fight.

It might be objected that when a bird takes its stand and repeats a set finished song at intervals for an hour at a stretch, remaining quietly perched, such a performance appears to be different in character from the irregular and simple displays which are unmistakably caused by a sudden glad impulse. But we are familiar with the truth that in organic nature great things result from small beginnings—a common flower, and our own bony skulls, to say nothing of the matter contained within them, are proofs of it. Only a limited number of species sing in a highly finished manner. Looking at many species, we find every gradation, every shade, from the simple joyous chirp and cry to the most perfect melody. Even in a single branch of the true vocalists we may see it—from the chirping bunting, and noisy but tuneless sparrow, to linnet and goldfinch and canary. Not only do a large majority of species show the singing instinct, or form of display, in a primitive, undeveloped state, but in that state it continues to show itself in the young of many birds in which melody is most highly developed in the adult. And where the development has been solely in the male the female never rises above that early stage; in her lively chirpings and little mock fights and chases, and other simple forms which gladness takes in birds, as well as in her plainer plumage, and absence of ornament, she represents the species at some remote period. And as with song so with antics and all set performances, aerial or terrestrial, from those of the whale and the elephant to those of the smallest insect.

Another point remains to be noticed, and that is the greater frequency and fulness in displays of all kinds, including song, during the love-season. And here Mr. Wallace's colour and ornament theory helps us to an explanation. At the season of courtship, when the conditions of life are most favourable, vitality is at its maximum, and naturally it is then that the proficiency in all kinds of dancing-antics, aerial and terrestrial,

appears greatest, and that melody attains its highest perfection. This applies chiefly to birds, but even among birds there are exceptions. The love-excitement is doubtless pleasurable to them, and it takes the form in which keenly pleasurable emotions are habitually expressed, although not infrequently with variations due to the greater intensity of the feeling. In some migrants the males arrive before the females, and no sooner have they recovered from the effects of their journey than they burst out into rapturous singing; these are not love-strains, since the females have not yet arrived, and pairing-time is perhaps a month distant; their singing merely expresses their overflowing gladness. The forest at that season is vocal, not only with the fine melody of the true songsters, but with hoarse cawings, piercing cries, shrill duets, noisy choruses, drummings, boomings, trills, wood-tappings—every sound with which different species express the glad impulse; and birds like the parrot that only exert their powerful voices in screamings—because ‘they can do no other’—then scream their loudest. When courtship begins it has in many cases the effect of increasing the beauty of the performance, giving added sweetness, verve, and brilliance to the song, and freedom and grace to the gestures and motions. But, as I have said, there are exceptions. Thus, some birds that are good melodists at other times sing in a feeble, disjointed manner during courtship. In Patagonia I found that several of the birds with good voices—one a mocking bird—were, like the robin at home, autumn and winter songsters.

The argument has been stated very briefly: but little would be gained by the mere multiplication of instances, since, however many, they would be selected instances—from a single district, it is true, while those in the *Descent of Man* were brought together from an immeasurably wider field; but the principle is the same in both cases, and to what I have written it may be objected that, if, instead of twenty-five, I had given a hundred cases, taking them as they came, they might have shown a larger proportion of instances like that of the cow-bird, in which the male has a set performance practised only during the love-season and in the presence of the female.

It is, no doubt, true that all collections of facts relating to animal life present nature to us somewhat as a ‘fantastic realm’—unavoidably so, in a measure, since the writing would be too bulky, or too dry, or too something inconvenient, if we did not take only the most prominent facts that come before us, remove

them from their place, where alone they can be seen in their proper relations to numerous other less prominent facts, and rearrange them patchwork-wise to make up our literature. But I am convinced that any student of the subject who will cast aside his books—supposing that they have not already bred a habit in his mind of seeing only ‘in accordance with verbal statement’—and go directly to nature to note the actions of animals for himself—actions which, in many cases, appear to lose all significance when set down in writing—the result of such independent investigation will be a conviction that conscious sexual selection on the part of the female is a delusion. Not only do I believe that this theory cumbrous the ground, that it would be well to get it out of the way and adopt some other explanation of the phenomena it deals with, true or false, so that it have some appearance of truth, or be not grossly and palpably false; but I also believe that every fresh suggestion adverse to it must be welcome to scientists generally. Chiefly because the theory demands a great deal of faith—and nobody likes that. Enthusiastic words concerning it proceed, as a rule, from those whose utterances weigh little, while our really independent thinkers speak of it somewhat coldly, and only when the subject cannot well be avoided. This inclines one to think that when they describe it as an established thing—a doctrine—in biology, they do not exactly mean that it is established on a rock, but only that it has not yet been washed away.

W. H. HUDSON.

For One Night Only.

AND Mrs. Skittleworth told the tale at a place called the Arts and Crafts, which, when you think of it, was unnecessary; Mrs. Skittleworth herself being all the arts and most of the crafts known to civilisation.

She was then practising a few of them on the centre divan opposite the entrance, where the fountain plays and the unhappy little pot-palms live. In the first place it was her sworn duty to keep an evasive eye upon a Miss Dormil, who was to be most strictly deprived of the comfort and society of a gentleman called Evans—Richard Evans—who had specially come to the Arts and Crafts to meet the young lady, who was under the chaperonage of Mrs. Skittleworth, according to the manners and customs of the British, who are barbarians. Now since Mrs. Skittleworth had conveyed Miss Dormil wholly and solely to meet Mr. Evans, and since she had to pretend that she saw neither him nor the girl, nor both together, or something equally logical, and since she uneasily suspected that Mrs. Dormil might at any minute arrive and drive the daughter home, and particularly since neither man nor maid seemed to have any idea of the lapse of time, you will understand that Mrs. Skittleworth's attention was distracted from the door whereat she expected Skittleworth every minute to appear in the company of a man whom she most urgently desired to avoid.

I believe that I had the honour to supply the Missing Link, for on my wandering appearance her face brightened as a General's when reinforcements pour past to battle.

'There is a man,' she said, 'an Unutterable Man. He will arrive with Tom in ten minutes. I shall immediately introduce you to him with smirks and grins. You will more immediately talk. Talk about anything you understand least, but overwhelm him with your conversation as you value my friendship. Then I shall escape with Tom, catch Miss Dormil, drive the Evans boy into

the stained-glass alcove—Good gracious! I hope he hasn't taken the girl there already!—and return to meet, under Providence, the very respectable Mrs. Dormil, who will ask the Unutterable Man to dinner. He is always hungry and . . . he has dined there before. Then you must transfer yourself to the Evans boy, and while we are all eating our artful afternoon tea and the craftful crumpet in the lunch-place you must escape with him secretly. There ought always to be two ways out of every place of appointment.' And she paused for breath.

She was used to delivering orders with much clearness, and I gathered from the pucker between her eyebrows that she was in anxiety. Her theory that men do not marry their mothers-in-law, though many mothers-in-law think otherwise, was perpetually leading her into second-hand *Comédie-Française* embarrassments. All earth and Skittleworth—who at heart is just as bad—could not restrain her from helping forward the most undesirable match ever lighted among her circle of acquaintance. On the Other Side of the World, where I first had the honour of meeting her, this weakness did not alarm: in England—which, it must always be remembered, is the habitation of heathen the worse for being imperfectly converted—she was misunderstood. But all young maidens loved her.

And I said: 'I hear and obey—on one condition.'

'On no conditions. You want me to tell you something. I refuse beforehand.'

'Very well, I shall begin to walk. I shall walk down Regent Street for hours and hours, and into the Mile End Road, and when Mrs. Dormil comes to thank you for giving her dear Clara, who is so artistic, such a delightful afternoon, the Evans boy will hang in the background pulling pieces out of his gloves, and Mrs. Dormil will not love you any more. Seriously, you went to the Theatre of the Patent Deviltries—'

'No! Inner Sepulchre: Inner Sepulchre!' said Mrs. Skittleworth, with a shudder. 'So glad we didn't invite you.'

'So am I,' I said icily. 'You made a box party, and by all accounts you all behaved abominably. You dropped opera-glasses on the heads of the bald, you conducted yourselves in such a manner that the entire house stopped to look at you, and you, overcome by shame, left at the end of the first act—weeping.'

'This,' said Mrs. Skittleworth pensively, 'is the hand of Mrs. Bletchley. She told you that at tea. What else did you learn?'

'The trouble is that I could learn no more. Not one of your guests would speak. Geissler, who can babble about founders' shares by the hour, was dumb. Skittleworth told me that I had better refer to you. I haven't seen Miss Dormil to speak to, and the Evans boy declares that it was a most enjoyable evening, but that you all left because the play was dull. The "Professor's Zoetrope" is not dull. It's the best play in London. What was the catastrophe? Everybody is wanting to talk about it, and no one knows anything. Six people have kept a secret for ten days—surely that's long enough. Tell, and I'll carry the Evans boy off through the roof, if I can't smuggle him out any other way.'

'Did anyone tell you it was Tom's fault?' began Mrs. Skittleworth cautiously, one eye on the door and the other on the iron-work exhibits.

'They said Singleton gave the party—and so . . .'

'He did *not*. It was that man Geissler—the Chicago Jew. Ugh! Tom and he cluck like new-laid hens over their offensive founders' shares, whatever those may be. Things that grow up in a night out of nothing and are sold by telegraph. I hate Geissler. I could never send him anything at dinner without hoping that the fat, or the drumstick, or the stuffing would choke him, and then I would *never* have sent for a doctor. Geissler found a box in the Inner Sepulchre. I know the shameful story now, but it almost reconciled me to the man for the moment. The very best box in the Inner Sepulchre—a five-guinea box that could have seated hordes—positive hordes. Do you know that he got it for twenty-five shillings? That was his ineffable meanness.'

'But a Chicago Jew is not always mean,' I adventured.

'Then he was a Levantine dragoman. I thank you for that. His father hauled Cook's tourists up and down the Pyramids for pence. And the worst of it is that he doesn't look like a Jew, and he ought to. We provided the dinner—he the box.'

'Who came?'

'Mrs. Eva van Agnew, the younger sister, and Geissler, both in one cab—two; Tom and I—four; and Miss Dormil and the Evans boy—six. That was all. I never allow a fortuitous concourse of atoms at my table; and, besides, we have no extra leaf in it. I had immense trouble in cajoling Mrs. Dormil to let her daughter go alone. She wished to assist. Heaven knows, I despise her as honourably as I despise most women; but when she

strips for festivities, I always think that she should be "hidden from the wise and prudent and"—how does it go? She makes *me* feel very undressed with draughts blowing all over me. And, you know, you can't say: "Won't you put a counterpane over your shoulders, you dear fat thing?" So they dined, and I was glad, because I knew neither of the young people would remember what they ate—they were in that stage; and Geissler was talking founders' shares to Tom, and Eva van Agnew was trying to talk to me and watch Geissler at the same time. Geissler wouldn't throw a word to her. There must have been a quarrel in the cab.'

'But why were you so concerned about Miss Dormil and the Evans boy?'

'Because he had inflicted himself upon me four twilights out of the seven. He would arrive at half-past four, and stay till half-past six, telling me that Miss Dormil was an angel and he was a ruffian, and did I think Mrs. Dormil could be brought to overlook his unworthiness? I liked it—I own I liked it immensely, even when he repeated himself for the twentieth time, and used to smash my drawing-room ornaments trying to make clear the intensity of his feelings. Oh, it's a relief to catch a young man devoid of nerves, and the less honourable emotions, who does not talk cheap French novels, and knows exactly what he wants, and is humble about it. He confessed all his little sins in the past to me, and I know exactly how his future is going to be arranged, and therefore I assist him in the present. And so we dined, and then we bundled off—Tom and I and the children in the brougham, and Eva and the Israelite, whom I will *never* forgive, in a hansom; and we saw the play and came away early. Isn't that enough for you?'

'You went in the brougham and the hansom—yes. And what happened after that?' I continued, unregarding.

'You won't believe what I tell you.'

'*You* are speaking.'

'But even I—consider dear mother Dormil, and *do* watch the entrance, please—may tell a fib.'

'Never without a motive.'

'Yes—that was the horror of it. It was so—without motive. So purposeless—so cruel; and yet there was a brassy vulgarity about it all that I can't explain. Try to understand that I am telling you what happened as accurately as I can. We were late for the farce, of course, and the overture was beginning. Of all horrors, it was the *Bronze Horse* overture.'

'That's only tinny—not terrifying, surely.'

'Wait! I had arranged things beautifully. Tom and I and Eva and Geissler were to sit in front, and the children at the back, because they were tall and wanted to talk. You know when you are absolutely certain of seeing a thing, you carry the outline of it in your mind's eye so that it looks real, don't you? When we trooped in, I was quite certain that I saw the stage, and so on, because a stage is naturally what you expect to see from the best box in the theatre. We banged the chairs about—they were horribly dusty—and then I heard the Evans boy saying, "Good God!" under his breath. Tom put his hand on my wrist, and drove my pet bracelet into the bone. "Don't jump or scream," he said. "Look!"'

'A headless woman in a vacant chair, or a red dog, or something nice and magaziny. Mrs. Skittleworth, *please* don't,' I whimpered, because Mrs. Skittleworth is much above that sort of entertainment.

'I knew you would,' she answered. 'And now I'm sorry that I didn't invite you. We looked out of the box at the stage, and at the house, and there was nothing whatever to be seen! Do you understand that?—Nothing whatever to be seen.'

'And what was it like?' I said with intense interest.

'It was awful. It was unspeakable. It was Chaos—raving, mad, howling Chaos! Have you ever been under chloroform, and do you know that die-away-and-away darkness when a train goes into a tunnel, through your head, and all the doors are being slammed, just before you lose consciousness? It was most like that feeling. But it wasn't. The darkness—the absolute blankness was in your head and your eyes, and yet you were staring into it—staring with your soul as well as your eyes. And then, through it all, we heard the rustle of the house, and the music of the *Bronze Horse*. That tune is the most diabolical one in the world.'

'Then you could hear?'

'We could hear everything. That was a further horror. We could hear the people getting into their places below, and the crinkle of the fans. You know what a hot house the Inner Sepulchre is. We could hear the rumble of traffic outside sometimes, but we could not see any single thing except ourselves in heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.'

'And what happened?'

'I don't quite remember. I think we must all have waited—'

I know I did—for the darkness to clear away. I felt as though I had been hit on the head, but would be all right presently if people took no notice and stood off from me, and, above all things, gave me air—plenty of air. Tom's hand on mine prevented me from making an absolute exhibition of myself. You know how Ashdown frizzes my hair for functions—I was frizzed all over my head very prettily, and I friz through my frizzes; and while I was staring and feeling oh! so deathly sick, I was distinctly conscious that my hair was tightening—Ashdown had frizzed it too well for it to stand on end—tightening and dragging my eyebrows up and up, so that I must have looked like an Aunt Sally at a fair.'

Mrs. Skittleworth laughed hysterically, and fluttered her very small hands.

A lean, unshorn, toadstool-coloured young gentleman in a blue cloak which would have been useless on horseback or in a high wind, a dead-leaf silk throat-wrap, and a sort of football jersey that was doing duty as a shirt, threw himself down on the divan and curled his legs into esoteric attitudes. Mrs. Skittleworth shook the quaver out of her voice, jumped three notes on the piano, and began as one in the middle of things generally.

'And so, you know, they invented a sort of combination garment for the lower classes—to save washing. It's very effective if it isn't worn too long, especially at the wristbands and round the neck, but then they provide a clout called a belcher to wear there, and you can get them for one and sevenpence halfpenny in Westbourne Grove. And they come here and do a lot of good, and they are called Socialists. Of course the uniform confuses the sexes. If it's a he, for instance, it's wearing its petticoats where it shouldn't, you know, and if it's a she it wouldn't wear a silk hat. But perhaps it's an exhibit, and if we ask it . . .'

The young gentleman rose and regarded us with unholy eyes from the lunch balcony.

'A woman who cannot be vulgar on occasion does not know the meaning of True Deportment,' said Mrs. Skittleworth. 'You should hear Mrs. Dormil bullying her governess. And, where were we? Oh, yes, in that darkness of terror. I think we must have been there for years before we heard the rustle of the curtain and the servants' opening dialogue in the "Zoetrope." I wanted to scream at the top of my voice, but it occurred to me that I had been standing up for untold ages in the face of the house. So I sat down and Tom began patting my hand in an absent-minded way and saying, "Poor little woman!" I remembered then, that

when I was fearfully ill and delirious on the Other Side of the World—no, I won't say how many years ago—Tom used to sit by my bed for days and weeks doing exactly the same thing; and whenever I would half come to life I was conscious of one hand being patted and "poored." I knew endearment of that sort was not in place on the box-edge; but I couldn't take my hand away for all the world. I wanted Tom as I have never wanted him in my life—not even when they all thought I was dying. And the dear boy patted my hand—bless him! He was as white as a sheet. Then I began to think of mother, exactly as a Frenchwoman would. I wondered where she was, and if this hideous darkness was her portion in the other world, and I wanted to step into it and find out and drag her in across the edge of the box. I reflected that I should fall on somebody's head in the attempt, and I laughed aloud horribly in the one pathetic scene in the "Zoetrope," where the Professor tells the little lodging-house servant the story of his life and his broken love-tale, and she cries and mops her face with the duster. And then I jumped, for I knew all the house was looking at me, and that upset the opera-glass, and I heard it fall and hit somebody below, and there was a scuffle, and every eye in everybody's head, I knew, was fixed on our unhappy, unhappy box. That was the incident of laughing and throwing glasses about that Mrs. Bletchley makes so much of. The thing dropped into the dark as a stone into water.'

'But why in the world didn't you all get up and run out, or complain, or—or do something?'

'After the affair of the opera-glass? Mrs. Skittleworth's party romping in a box, dropping glasses, laughing, and then running out like children in a country church when they've tipped hymn-books from the gallery? *Never!* I may be introduced to the other world against my will, but I know my duty to this, as long as I am in it. I was praying for the first act to end, for I was afraid I could not stand the tension!'

'And the others?'

'You may well ask. I looked round when my own feelings were a little under control. What a blessed thing is a British education! All the Jew that ever cheated in Israel came out in Geissler's face. He was on the right of the box, half standing up in his chair and gripping the edge with both hands till the plush plumped up in red gores between his fingers. He was not looking at the stage, but into the darkness, and I was more than

conscious that he must be staring fiendishly at the opposite box. Staring like a maniac. I felt that those stares were returned. Oh, I felt pins and needles all over, so sure I was that we were being watched while we were smitten with blindness! Complain? How could we complain? Can you go to an attendant at a theatre and say, "We can't see out of this box—a five-guinea box on the grand tier—the best in the house? If there is one place whence you ought to see all that is to be seen—" Mrs. Skittleworth nearly broke down at this point—"it's a box. I'll never take a box again. Give me stalls, or the gallery, where you are in touch with your neighbour and all see ghosts together."

'Was there a ghost, then?'

'No, no, no—only their country: the room they had just left. Geissler may have seen some. He looked hideous—as though he were being burned alive. His shoulders were cramped up to the back of his head; but I don't think he was afraid. He seemed to be in pain. Thinking of founders' shares possibly. Eva made the most painful exhibition of us all. Promise you won't tell, of course. Her place was empty, and she was down on the floor of the box—mercifully out of sight—her face hidden in a coat thrown over a chair. She had pressed herself into one corner like a frightened rabbit, and was praying. A box isn't a place to pray in. At least, not when the house is full. You know Eva's High-Church—extremely so; and even in her agony she was intoning. I stooped down and tried to take one of her hands, and said: "Hush dear, hush! think of your dress!" but she only went on bleating, "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways l-l-like lost sheep," over and over again. She was kneeling on that little cheap silk of hers, and nothing in the wide world will ever get the dust out of it again; and she had bundled my heavy white "cloud" over her head to shut out the dark, and she looked just like a lost sheep. I might as well have spoken to one. I am very sorry for Eva.'

'And the others?'

'They had arrived at a most complete understanding, and that nearly made me scream. I felt that I was responsible for everything—Chaos included. Clara was in the Evans boy's arms, totally and completely, at the back of the box to the left; and to this day I cannot tell why all the house didn't see them. They must have fancied it was the Day of Judgment. They were murmuring things that you very seldom hear from dresscoats and

evening frocks, and I honestly believe they never saw the darkness after they had explained themselves.'

'Poor Mrs. Dormil!'

'It wasn't my fault. I only wished them to improve their acquaintance with each other. Am I responsible if the powers of darkness are leagued against me to precipitate matters? Yes, they were in each other's arms expecting immediate translation. What I saw and said passed in a flash, though I have been so long telling it. The rest was interminable waiting for the first act to end, Eva praying on the floor, and the house rocking with laughter at the jokes, Geissler glaring into Tophet, Tom patting my hand, the children in another world—bless them!—and I playing propriety for them all. Taking an interest in the play in order to prove that I saw it all, and was as much amused as anybody, clapping when the unseen hosts clapped, and smirking when I felt it was time to smirk. I was almost obsequiously attentive to the "Zoetrope," and I flatter myself that even the Bletchley woman will admit that I behaved perfectly.'

'Mrs. Skittleworth,' I said, in a voice broken with emotion, 'I have long admired and respected you beyond any human being alive. I now worship you with fear and trembling. Men have won the Victoria Cross for less than that.'

Mrs. Skittleworth was graciously pleased to bow her head, always with one eye on the door. She continued:

'Then the curtain went down, and we fled. I have a dim recollection of flying into the cloak-room screaming like a peacock: "My things! my things! my things!" Eva was close behind me. We fell together into the tire-woman's arms. Luckily she was big, and ready with her blandishments at once. She said: 'There! there! there! Never mind. 'Ere's your cloak, mum;' and I answered, thickly: 'Yes, yes, yes. Of course—of course. Too hot, too cold; very fine weather indeed.' She gave us both the best thing available and on the spot. It proved the existence of a conspiracy. It was brandy-and-soda—strong! You should have seen Eva and I gulping it down like washerwomen, while that dear tall Clara drifted about like a saint in a holy dream, conscious that there might have been something wrong somewhere, but more conscious that things were more right.'

'We skipped down the passages. We dare not run, but we skipped; and Geissler and Eva went off in separate cabs. I know he volunteered to see her home, for I caught one gesture of hers

that would've made the fortune of a tragedy actress. Villain as I am convinced he is, I admire that man for his nerve. Now comes the proof of the conspiracy. Our brougham was on hand when we came out. Generally Jobbins retires to a public-house, and Tom has to prance through the puddles and drag him out personally. But he was waiting, which was a greater miracle than anything else. I spoke to him about it the next day, complimenting him on his virtue.

"Well, mum," he said, "I wouldn't ha' kep' the pore 'orses 'cept that every man of 'em in the theatre, an' the policemen, an' all the lot sez to me that you'd be out at the end of the fust act. And so you was, mum, an' it was a good job I waited 'stead o' savin' the pore 'orses."

"That is the only approach to an explanation that I have been able to arrive at—that, and the fact that Geissler got the box for twenty-five shillings. The entire theatre staff of the Inner Sepulchre must know all about it, and yet . . . Can you believe? Do you believe? Try to speak the truth. Geissler has never given any sign of his existence to me since that night. Eva has gone out of town, and Clara and the Evans boy . . . you see. Somehow I feel as though I were responsible for everything. You do believe, don't you?"

"Implicitly," I replied. "If *you* cannot see a thing which is in front of you, who am I to dissent? Of course I believe. You intend to take no further steps?"

"None whatever. I'll never set foot in that theatre again. That's all; and Tom doesn't like me to talk about it. Clara won't speak either, I'm certain. She imagines it was sent from heaven to assist the Evans boy to propose to her."

"Poor Mrs. Dormil!"

"Yes, and here, for my many sins, she comes, without Tom or the other man. Fly! Catch Miss Dormil and walk ostentatiously with her while I lure the old lady to the food-troughs. The Evans boy can escape unseen if he has any sense."

But at that crisis he had not, and they both glowered at me when I found them in the stained-glass alcove; and I had to explain matters apart to the Evans boy, and he left with the air of a baffled conspirator; and though I was dying to ask Miss Dormil twenty thousand questions, she being wrapped up in her own vain imaginings, I could never get any farther than—

"What do you think of the Arts and Crafts?"

RUDYARD KIPLING.

Miracle Plays.

IN the year 1633 the peasants of Oberammergau, a village in Bavaria, being stricken with a pestilence, or, according to another account, threatened with loss of livelihood through a disease of the flax which stopped all the spindles, vowed to God to publicly perform the 'Passion of the Saviour' every ten years if their calamities were removed. Thereupon the plague was stayed, and, in fulfilment of the vow, the play was performed until the end of the last century, when it was prohibited by Montgelas, a reforming statesman, who told the peasants that hearing sermons on the Passion was better than parading the Saviour on a stage. But the simple folk secured an audience of the king and pleaded their broken vow, so that the minister's prohibition was repealed on condition that the play was recast to suit modern ideas.

In 1811 it was once more performed in the churchyard, and in following decades in the village meadow till 1850, when a permanent theatre was erected. The performances in 1870 were interrupted by summons of certain of the players—Joseph Mair, who took the part of Christ, amongst them—to the ranks when the Franco-German war broke out; but happily they were all spared to resume their parts in 1871. The performances take place this year at intervals from Whitsuntide to the end of Septemb^r, and the fact that the play is the lineal, and well-nigh the sole worthy, descendant—for the puppet-shows, the Christmas mummings, and other doggerel survivals, are of kindred ancestry—of the curious group of Miracle Plays, Mysteries, and Moralities, which preceded the secular drama in our own and other countries, may give special interest to a brief account of the originals. The materials from which our knowledge of English Miracle Plays, including under this common term plays founded on incidents in the lives of saints and plays founded on Scripture narratives, is derived, are fragmentary and scanty compared with those extant on the Continent. But they are copious enough to make their digest

into a few pages difficult, and therefore any reference to the sacred plays of other countries, notably of France, their special birthplace and home, whence they were imported amongst us, probably by French ecclesiastics, must be omitted. There is, however, no essential difference between our English plays and their foreign variants. Neither can more than bare allusion be made to the Moralities, which were of allegorical type, abstract qualities being personified, as, e.g., when 'a play setting forth the goodness of the Lord's Prayer was played in the city of York, in which play all manner of vices and sins were held up to scorn, and the virtues were held up to praise.' Sometimes the two species of plays were blended, as when Justice, Mercy, Peace, and Death appear on the stage with historical characters.

Although the early Church extinguished the drama, its new birth was connected with the offices of religion. The origin of the plays, as literary works, is probably to be found in the metrical paraphrases of Scripture, with which quaint and absurd legends were fused, and by which a knowledge of the events recorded in, and of the doctrines deduced from, the Bible was spread among the people. The dramatic element in these metrical versions, of which Cædmon's (*temp.* vii. cent.) is the oldest, naturally led to their recital with some degree of action, and to their passage into more dramatic form, until the Sacred Play became a recognised agent of popular instruction, and a refreshing diversion to the monastic and conventual life.

Hase remarks that from the time of Gregory the Great the Mass itself became an almost dramatic celebration of the world-tragedy of Golgotha. It embraced the whole scale of religious emotion, from the mournful cry of the *Miserere* to the jubilee of the *Gloria in Excelsis*. And both Klein and Ward agree that the germ of the Miracle Play, as an acted drama, is to be found in the liturgy of the Mass, the symbolic processes in which exhibit a dramatic progression. In the pantomimical element in the gestures of the priest, the epical in the lessons read, the lyrical in the antiphonal singing, and subsequently in the addition of *tableaux vivants*—living pictures of scenes from New Testament history—as early as the fifth century, the way was prepared for the public performance of sacred plays, of which the clergy were the actors and the church was the scene.

The plays were originally written in Latin, then afterwards rendered into Norman-French to adapt them for exhibition before the court, and finally into the vulgar tongue for the amusement

and instruction of the people, although concerning this there had been hesitation, for in the British Museum MS. of the Chester Plays it is said that the author 'was thrice at Rome before he could obtain leave of the Pope to have them in the English tongue.' But the happy result of their translation into the vernacular is that they are rich storehouses of local dialects and customs of the time. They are, alike in form and spirit, for the most part in keeping with the dignity and seriousness of their subjects. There is no lack of reverence; the characters are skilfully and sympathetically treated, and the authors, with true insight, availed themselves—as an example or two to be presently cited will show—of certain incidents as vehicles of harmless mirth. They at least succeeded in their main purpose in making the spectacles channels of popular instruction in the leading truths of the Christian religion in days when the Bible was a sealed book, except to the clergy.

That these remained the sole actors for a considerable period is shown by the retention of the stage directions in Latin; but the control of the plays gradually passed into lay hands as their performance was transferred from the churches to the public thoroughfares, when we find the trading guilds, which were also religious fraternities, taking the lead. Each craft undertook the expenses of production of one of the plays of each series, employing lay pens to alter and adapt as occasion demanded, and entrusting both plays and properties, choice of 'moste connyng, discrete and able' actors, as well as the rehearsals, to an official. Each guild had its patron saint, whose festival-day became the occasion for pageants in which a Miracle Play connected with events in his life was performed, first in the guild-hall and then in the streets. Although there was in Catholic England no lack of festivals, the institution of the feast of *Corpus Christi* by Pope Urban IV. in 1264 gave an impetus to the performance of the plays. The importance into which that festival grew led the guilds to observe it as a common feast-day, and to make the procession of the symbols of the Mystery of the Incarnation, although independent of them, the occasion of performing a series of plays, beginning with the 'Creation' and ending with 'Doomsday.' Some of the plays, as, e.g., those dealing with the Nativity, were performed at their appropriate seasons. Actors and audience were astir early, since the entire series was presented between sunrise and sunset; 'Euery player,' says the Mayor of York in his proclamation, 'shall be redy in his pagiaunt at convenyant tyme, that is to say, at

the mydhowre betwix iiiijth and vth of the cloke in the mornynge, and then all oyer pageantz fast following ilk one after oyer as yer course is without tarieng.' The records of the plays, of which performances took place in all parts of England, show that they were assigned as nearly as possible in harmony with the business of the crafts. Thus we find that the Shipwrights played the 'Building of the Ark'; the 'Fysshers and Marynars' (at Chester, the water-carriers), 'the Flood'; the Goldsmiths, the 'Adoration of the Magi'; the Vintners, the 'Miracle of Cana'; the Bakers, the 'Last Supper'; and the Pinners and Painters, the 'Crucifixion.'

With the exception of a few isolated specimens, most of which have been printed, the English Miracle Plays are comprised in four series, known respectively as the York, the Chester, the Coventry, and the Towneley. The York series consists of forty-eight plays, written in Northern English dialect, and the manuscript, which is doubtless a copy of a much older original, is assigned to the middle of the fourteenth century. The Chester series, which contains twenty-five plays, has been assigned to the middle of the thirteenth century, but experts now place it at the end of the fourteenth century. The age of the Coventry series, comprising forty-two plays, is fixed by the date 1468 on the manuscript; and the Towneley series, which has much in common with the York collection, is referred to the close of the fifteenth century. It comprises thirty-two plays, five of which are almost literal copies of corresponding plays in the York manuscript.

The feature common to the four series is their grouping of the leading events narrated in the Bible into a consecutive whole, but with manifold differences, both in the less important parts and in the proportion of plays based on legends outside the canonical books. For example, the popular mediæval legend of the 'Fall of Lucifer,' which has great prominence given to it in the *Cursor Mundi*, a Northumbrian poem written early in the fourteenth century, and of which Milton makes effective use in *Paradise Lost*, is the subject of a play in the York and Chester series, but is absent from the Coventry and Towneley. The Coventry series has no plays founded on the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, but has several founded on those of the New Testament; whilst in the Chester series, only one play, based on the legend of Christ's Descent into Hell, has its source in the apocryphal writings.

As hinted already, when the plays were rendered into the vulgar tongue, a good many extraneous elements were introduced,

according to the skill and humour of the transcribing adapter, and according to the audience whose appetite had to be whetted. Thus the Chester 'Banes' (a word retained in our marriage *bans* or *banns*) tell how Done Rondall, 'monke of the Abay,'

In pagentes set fourth apparently to all eyne,
The Olde and Neue Testament with lively comforth,
Interminglinge therewith, onely to make sporte,
Some thinges not warranted by any writt,
Which to gladd the hearers he woulde men to take yt.

In the Miracle Play of 'St. Nicholas,' written by Hilarius, an English monk of the twelfth century, the conversation of pot-house gamblers is the mirth-provoking incident. In a yet earlier play, by the nun Hrosvitha, the persecutor of three virgin-martyrs is represented as stricken with madness, and as embracing dripping-pans and all kinds of cooking utensils, till his own soldiers, taking him for a devil, maltreat him. In the Towneley series, Cain brawls and bullies his hind like a coarse Yorkshire farmer; Noah's wife (as also in the York and Chester series) is a termagant, and the quarrels between the couple are full of comic dialogue. In the play of the 'Angels and the Shepherds,' where the materials are slender, advantage is seized on to introduce abundance of rustic realism. In the York series Judas is ridiculed by a porter; Pilate outwits a squire, who sells a plot of land for thirty pieces of silver paid to the traitor, and who gives up the deeds without securing the money. In many of the plays in which the devil is a character he appears only to be laughed at. The anachronisms and classical allusions are amusing, as when Noah's wife swears by Christ, by the Virgin Mary, and by St. John; Pharaoh and Cæsar Augustus by 'Mahoune,' and Balak by Mars; when Herod asks his council what they find 'in Vyrgyll, in Homere,' concerning the birth of Christ, and promises to make one of his councillors Pope; and when the Sibyl prophesies before Octavius of Jesus and the Judgment. Touches of current life and usage here and there stand out amid the ancient story: the carpenter's tools and measurements used by Noah, as well as those employed at the Crucifixion; the bitter-cold weather at the Nativity, telling of a truly northern Christmas; the quaint offerings of the shepherds when they repair to 'Bedleme' to give the Divine babe a 'lytyle spruse cofer,' a ball, and a bottle; the ruin of the poor by murrain; the drinking between Pilate and his wife; the excellent representation of a heavy manual job by

a set of rough workmen in the Crucifixion. Illustrative, too, of English customs and forms of justice are the borrowing of the town beast; Judas offering himself as bondman in his remorse; the mortgage of a property, raising money by 'wedde-sette' or pledge; and the trial scene in certain plays, in which Pilate 'in Parlament playne' vindicates the course of law in a way that would commend itself to the learned author of *Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality*, and puts down the malice of the accuser, Caiaphas, and the pursuer Annas (cf. *York Mystery Plays*, Introd. by Miss Toulmin Smith, lvii.). The account-books of the several guilds show that the actors were paid according to the length of their parts and 'business,' not according to their dignity. Thus, in a play setting forth the Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus, the impersonators of Herod and Caiaphas received 3s. 4d. each, of Annas 2s. 2d., and of Jesus 2s.; which was also the sum paid to each actor in the parts of his executioners. The tariff varies for acting the character of God; sometimes it is 2s., at other times, as in the Drapers' Pageant of 'Doomsday' at Coventry, 'hym that playeth Goddes parte' had 3s. 4d. Pilate has as much as 4s., his wife (Dame Procula) 2s., the Devil and Judas 1s. 6d. each. Peter was paid 1s. 4d., the two damsels 12d., while Fauston, the hangman of Judas, receives 5d., and for cock-crowing, 4d.

As in the case of the earliest recorded performance of a Miracle Play, 'Ludus de St. Katharina,' at Dunstable, about 1110, when the players borrowed their dresses from the sacristan of St. Albans, ecclesiastical vestments were obtained from the abbeys and churches for the use of the actors of sacerdotal characters. Ultimately the clergy refused to lend their vestments to the guilds, who were obliged to provide the costumes and 'properties,' the poorer fraternities hiring the pageants of the wealthier or receiving help from them. Sharp says that 'in 1548 the Cappers received 3s. 4d. from the Whittawer's Company for the "hyer of our pageand,"' and 'in 1574 and for some subsequent years the Card-makers and Sadlers contributed 13s. 4d. annually to the Cappers towards their pageant' (*Coventry Mysteries*, pp. 45, 48). From the same authority we cull the following extracts from the guild registers of expenditure:

It^m for mendyng of dame P'cula's garments, 7d. To reward to Maisturres Grymesby (Mrs. Grimesby) for lendyng off her geir flor Pylatt's wyfe, 12d. Pd. for V schepskens for god's coot, and for makyng, 3s. Pd. for a gyrdyll for god, 3d. Pd. for payntyng and

gyldyng god's cote . . . It^m for a quarte of wyne for heyrynge of P'cula is gounne, 2*d*. It^m For makyng spret of god's cote and 2½ yards. of bokeram, 2*s*. 1*d*.

Christ was represented as wearing a gilt peruke or beard, a painted sheepskin coat, a girdle, and red sandals. His tormentors wore black buckram jackets with nails and dice on them. The Virgin Mary wore a crown; the angels had white surplices and wings; the 'savyd sowles' wore white coats; and the 'dampnyd sowles' had their faces blackened and wore black coats, sometimes with red and yellow stripes on them to represent flames. In accordance with the popular belief, the colour of Judas's hair and beard was red, as also was the beard of the devil. He was furnished with wings, sprouting from a black buckram or leathern dress trimmed with feathers and hair, and with claws for the hands and feet. Items of outlay, as of 8*d*. to 'Wattis for dressyng of the devell's hede,' show that some pains were bestowed on the head-gear. But the heaviest expense was incurred over the dress and appointments of Herod, who wore a gilt and silvered helmet, and was attired like a Saracen, his face being covered by a mask, as shown by the item, 'payd to a peynter for peyntyng and mendyng of herodes heed, 4*d*.'

The Cornish plays were performed within stone circles, but elsewhere the stage was erected on fixed scaffolding, or more often, as the term *pageant* indicates—a term which became applied to the plays themselves—it was borne upon a vehicle, and thus conveyed to the different parts of the town. It had an upper and a lower division, the lower being the dressing-room and sometimes used to represent the nether world, while the upper division was the main stage, 'beinge all open on the tope that all behoulders might heare and see.' The scenery was painted or modelled, the names of places being affixed at the back of the stage. The actors appeared on the 'boards' together, and were treated as invisible until their turn to speak came. The plays, where necessary, as in that of the 'Adoration of the Shepherds,' had musical accompaniments; one 'Jhon' was paid '4*d*. to syng the basse,' and we find an item of '7*d*. for mendyng the trumpets.' Lights were also used for the Star of Bethlehem and for the night scene of the Betrayal. Pots and kettles were banged when the devil carried off souls to hell; thunder volleyed during the play of the 'Transfiguration'; and among the larger items is '3*s*. 4*d*. for a baryll for the yerthequake.' But 'Hellmouthe' was costlier than the barrel, and must have been the 'sensation' of the pageants.

As contemporary pictures show, it was a fiery-eyed, dragon-shaped head, with jaws opening and shutting by means of a windlass, and leading to a murky cavern, either with real fire within or with imitation flames, and filled with a yelling horde of demons tormenting the shrieking damned.

Among the items of outlay thereon are: 'payd for payntyng and makyng newe of hell-hede, 14*d.*; for kepyng of fyre at hell-mothe, 4*d.*; for setting the world of fyre, 5*d.*; for kepyng the wynd (windlass) 6*d.*; paid to ij wormes of conscience, 16*d.*'

The plays themselves, in their alternations of pathos and humour, often broadening into farce, are, on the whole, far from tedious, and, as far as their archaisms are concerned, not difficult to read. In 'Abraham's Sacrifice' the dramatist presents with skill the struggle between fatherly love and submission to the Divine command; touches of tenderness are given to the dialogue, as when Isaac, seeing his father dumb with grief, says:

Fayre fadyr, ye go ryght stelle,
I pray you, fadyr, speke unto me.

In the 'Processus Noe cum Filiis' (the term *processus* was applied to the plays on account of their exhibition in connection with the *Corpus Christi* procession) Noah's wife jeers him for croaking about the coming Flood and gets a thrashing, after which he begins to build the Ark—'in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.' When the Ark is finished, she refuses to enter it, and a second fight ensues, Noah complaining that his 'tak is nere in two,' and his wife that she 'is bet so blo.' These quarrels are referred to by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*:

Hast thou not herd, quod Nicholas also,
The sorwe of Noe with his felawship,
Or that he mighte get his wife to ship?

But the drollest incident in all the series is that in the second Towneley play of the Shepherds ('Secunda Pastorum'), when the watchers of their flocks are joined by one Mak, whom they suspect as a sheep-stealer. To keep guard on him, they make him lie between them, but he contrives, while they are sleeping, to slink off with a sheep on his back. When he reaches home his wife suggests that they pop the sheep in a cradle, she feigning lying-in. Mak returns to the shepherds without having been missed, and shams sleep till roused, when he says that he has dreamt that his wife has given birth to a 'yong lad,' and that he must

hurry home. They miss the sheep after he has left, and follow him to his house, when he begs them to 'speke soft over a seke woman's hede.' He denies the charge of having stolen the sheep, for which they make vain search, till, as they are leaving, one shepherd asks the other if he gave the babe anything. Mak deprecates the shepherd's offer to give the 'barne bot vj pence,' because he 'slepys.' But the shepherd insists on at least kissing the child :

Gyf me lese hym to kys and lyft up the clowtt.
What the deville is this? he has a long snowte.

Secundus Pastor. He is lyke to oure shepe.

Tertius Pastor. Wylle ye se how thay swedylle
His foure feytt in the medylle?
Sagh I never in a credylle
A hornyd lad or now.

Mak. Peasse byd I: what! lette be youre fare;
I am he that hym gatt and yond woman hym bare.

The wife also tries to brazen it out by declaring that the babe has been transformed by an elf; and the incident ends with the thrashing of Mak, and the angels singing *Gloria in Excelsis*.

Such, broadly outlined, are the features and character of the institution which in no small degree satisfied the appetite for amusement, while it affected conduct for good, during the times that lay between the opposition of the Church to the drama—in the earlier epochs denying baptism to the theatre-goer, and in the later epochs denying the last consolations of religion to the actor. At its second revival the stage arose well equipped for all time by the materials which the genius of Shakespeare and his lesser contemporaries supplied; and only when it falls below the level to which they raised it will it cease to be the worthy successor of these old Miracle Plays, which held their more refracting 'mirror up to Nature,' wherein men might see what soul of goodness dwells in things evil.

EDWARD CLODD.

That Dance at the Robsons'.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. ROBSON was giving a dance. Not that there was anything remarkable about the fact, for Mrs. Robson often gave dances; but that this was an especially elegant thing in dances was made apparent to the meanest intelligence by the incessant roll of carriages, the brilliance of the lights that flashed from every window, the red carpeted steps leading to the door, and the striped awning that protected that red carpet from the pelting rain.

Up to the portals of this scene of splendour drove one Roger Moreton, a special favourite with Mrs. Robson, and, as such, discovered by all the intricacies of cousin relationship to be in some way 'connected with the family.'

'Trust Mrs. Robson for seeing that her guests are well awned on a night like this,' was the aforesaid Roger Moreton's mental comment, as he jumped from his hansom and ran up the steps under the protecting covering.

He had come early, but his hostess and her daughter Maggie were both in the drawing-room, the latter demonstrating by her Eighteenth Century robe that the dance was to be of the fancy dress description, beloved of woman, abhorred by all but the vainest of the other sex. Vanity of an overwhelming nature not being one of Moreton's foibles, it was with much joy he had availed himself of an exemption from 'making an ass of himself' with velvet and lace, in consideration of the fact that he had only the previous day returned from a fortnight's trip to Norway.

After shaking hands with him, Maggie disappeared, 'to see after the coffee' she said, leaving her mother to impart to Moreton the profound secret of her daughter's recent engagement to a 'most delightful young man' with due maternal pride, and to gossip with him generally until the people began to arrive.

'Here come the Macleods,' said his hostess, coming up to him presently. 'I want you to know Miss Macleod. Look at that friend of Kitty's!' she whispered in a hasty aside to her daughter, who was talking to Roger at the moment. 'What in the world does that dress mean?' then almost in the same breath, 'Mr. Moreton, Miss Macleod'—just as Roger was associating her remark with a tall, brilliantly clad figure, overtopping the pretty little shepherdess to whom he found himself introduced.

He had just taken her card, after asking for a dance, when the other girl turned and glanced at him. Immediately she held out her hand, and smiled frankly.

'Why, it's Mr. Moreton!' she cried; 'but I suppose you don't remember me—Norah Kingsley? I was a little girl when you used to come to Clarelands.'

'Of course I do now. How strange to meet you here!' he exclaimed, shaking hands with her.

'Oh! I don't think it's extraordinary at all,' she returned. 'I'm for ever meeting people I haven't seen for years, in town. It used to surprise me at first, but I'm getting over it. Witness the calm and unmoved manner in which I greeted you.'

'It was admirable,' answered Moreton, banteringly; 'I envy you your presence of mind. I confess to making the same inane remark, even though I run against an old friend on an average once a week. I *may* call you an old friend, mayn't I?' he continued, holding out his hand for her programme. 'May I have this? It's the fourth, the first you have vacant.'

'Yes, you may take it, if you don't think the habit you mentioned, of running against your old friends, will be too strong for you!' she answered laughing.

'I said once a week, if you remember,' returned Moreton. 'The dance won't be kept up *more* than six hours, so the chances are against a collision. Will you risk it?'

They had moved aside a little while they talked.

'You have not grown up a bit like what I expected,' was his next remark.

'That is either a compliment to the little girl of—how long?—seven years ago, or to me,' she rejoined laughing. 'Oh, *do* say it's to me!'

'It *is* to you.'

'Thank you!' with a little curtsy.

'Roger, I want to introduce Miss Featherstone,' said Mrs. Robson's voice at his elbow, as Norah turned to give her card to

a nervous youth, appropriately attired as a brigand, who was hesitatingly soliciting it.

During his dance with the gay little shepherdess, whom he had heard more than once alluded to as 'Kitty,' Roger gleaned an enormous amount of information about her friend 'Norah Kingsley.' On this subject, as on many others, she showed no lack of conversational power, and Roger listened and was interested, for he had liked the little girl (a niece of his father's old friend Pierson) whom he used to meet at Clarelands, before the old man's death, and he remembered pitying the bright little thing for having to be brought up by 'Aunt Pierson,' who was a lady of the funereal order.

'Imagine! Norah had been to Cambridge, and yet wasn't a bit "blue."' Her father had evidently been a man of perverted judgment, for it had been his wish that Norah should 'get the Higher Education, whatever that was'; but 'it didn't take,' and Norah was apparently just as much interested in 'young men and frivolities of that sort' as Kitty herself, which was praise of no mean order. For once in her life, Norah was having a good time, she hoped, during this visit which 'Aunt Pierson' had ungraciously sanctioned.

Miss Kingsley did not altogether care for Clarelands then? Moreton supposed. Whereupon followed a vivid picture of a bright, lively, clever girl shut up with a person who 'hurled texts' at her all day long, and Roger was indignantly asked if it was likely. From Moreton's previously formed impression of Aunt Pierson, thus forcibly recalled, he was compelled to acknowledge the imbecility of his query.

'But you *know* her,' exclaimed Kitty presently with a face of horror.

'Well, am I, therefore, to be thought incapable of sound judgment?'

'That's all right; I thought she might have been a dear friend, perhaps,' remarked Kitty mischievously as her next partner came to claim his dance.

A little later, Roger was sitting with Norah Kingsley on the balcony leading from the dancing room. This had been covered in with red and white awning, while Chinese lanterns and swinging baskets of flowers hung from the roof. At each end was a tall group of palms and tropical plants, and behind one of these foliage screens was discovered a pleasing arrangement of seats—there were two. On Roger evincing a tendency towards admiration of this grouping—of chairs, not palms—Norah had declared

they looked 'earwiggy,' and had immediately sat down on a low couch just outside.

She had just been propounding an entirely new and original theory on dances. The dancing young man, she thought, ought to be engaged for the evening. He should be liberally rewarded, pecuniarily, but on the distinct understanding that no remark on the heat of the room, or, indeed, on any subject whatever, would be expected from him. The business of dancing being thus settled, the hostess would be free to ask all the nice men who don't dance, and they could sit out, and talk to the girls between the waltzes.

Moreton was proceeding to take a note of this luminous suggestion, when he stopped to enquire the fate of an anomaly in the shape of a man 'who looked sensible' at any rate, and yet *had* been discovered to dance well.

'Why, of course he would get the best of it all round,' was the answer; 'he would have the double delight of dancing *and* conversation—that is, if he wasn't a fraud, you know. In that case he would be deposed from the position of a conversationalist, and made to enter the ranks of the mere dancing machine.'

'Deposed by a council of girls, of course?'

'Naturally,' returned Norah, laughing.

'Cambridge has made you very strong-minded, and all that sort of thing, I suppose?' he said suddenly, after a moment's pause.

Norah turned her head a little and looked up at him. 'You have been dancing with Kitty, of course,' she answered. 'It's no use,' she went on, tapping her foot on the ground in half pretended half real exasperation, 'I *never* can frivol like any other girl, and I never can conceal the awful fact. The first thing a young man always says to me after dancing with Kitty is, "Your friend tells me you have just come from Newnham, and are awfully clever," &c., &c. Did you mean what you asked just now for a statement or a question,' she enquired, 'so that I may know what to do with it?'

'It was a question, I believe,' he answered.

'What made you ask it?' she demanded, suddenly throwing off her light manner, while the colour rose to her cheeks. 'Why should I necessarily be strong-minded, or anything else objectionable, just because I've been to Cambridge? Everyone asks me that, or takes it for granted, which is worse, and now you——'

'I am very sorry,' began Moreton gravely. 'What can I do——'

'Dust and ashes is the orthodox thing, I believe,' she replied,

smiling, and then she added apologetically, 'It's very silly of me to get excited about it, but I *hate* to be thought different from other girls. I thought Newnham was an old story now, but I find that no sooner does a man find out that I'm a Newnhamite, than either I'm deluged with remarks so witty that my poor little brain quite misses the point, or else I'm asked hundreds of questions, which I can't answer, on abstruse subjects I've never thought about! I wonder I haven't sunk exhausted under the strain long ago'—and she sank back with a comic little gesture of despair.

'It may seem callous, but let me tell you there are no outward and visible signs of exhaustion, and I think a mental strain must be becoming. I shall recommend it to all my lady friends. By the way, I should like to ask, were my questions not so unfortunate to-night, what you are meant for?' touching her dress as he spoke.

'Ah, I knew it was coming,' murmured Norah plaintively. 'Isn't it pretty?' she asked anxiously.

'Extremely. I like it better than any dress in the room, but I can't quite grasp the idea. There *is* an idea, of course?'

'Certainly, though the average mind will never seize its meaning. I'm afraid it's needless to remark now that I didn't think of it myself.'

'Don't keep me in suspense, I implore! Mine is the strictly average mind. To me it suggests the feminine Mephistopheles effect, but of course I shall be laughed to scorn.'

'Not at all,' returned the girl with an approving nod. 'You are getting very warm (observe the appropriate adjective; I throw it in, free of charge): I am "A Flame."'

'Of course; that is what you reminded me of when I was watching you dance just now, only I couldn't put the floating suggestion into words.'

'I was the "floating suggestion" of course. That's very pretty. I've never been called that before, but I like it,' she answered, looking down at her little red slippers meditatively.

At this point, Moreton found himself deciding, for no apparent reason, that he was an ass not to have taken more than three waltzes before the girl's card was full. A very short pause, however, sufficed for this mental comment, and he returned to the subject of the dress.

It was a notion of a friend of hers who had seen her playing blind man's buff at Newnham, Norah explained. 'She said I reminded her of a flame. So *my* practical mind instantly rushed to

"Liberty's," and my body followed some time after, and there I adapted the idea to the requirements of a fancy dress."

'Of course I've never seen you—er—play blind man's buff,' began Moreton, 'but——'

'Well, we'll play it now, if you like,' she laughed; 'only *you* must be blind man.'

'Miss Kingsley!' Roger burst forth, as one who speaks under strong inward compulsion, 'do Newnhamites——'

'Ever behave like rational beings and play blind man's buff? you would say. Well,' unheeding his protest, 'some of them, who are not sticks (there are a good *many* sticks), do. They even dance occasionally.'

'You didn't miss the men?' asked Roger tentatively.

'Well, *I* couldn't then, you know, because I had never danced with a man in my life before this winter. Of course it's nicer to dance with men,' she said, as though stating a self-evident fact; 'but it's delicious under any circumstances.'

Moreton looked at her with an expression in which wonder, curiosity, and admiration were blent.

'Never danced with men before!' and it might be her eighth season for self-possession, and she waltzes as though she had never done anything else, he thought.

'I shall look upon Cambridge girls henceforward with the respect that comes of enlightenment,' he remarked presently.

'You judge from the talented individual who designed my garment, but that isn't quite fair. Oh yes, they *have* ideas,' she said, opening her fan and waving it a little. 'Many ideas! some of them are on dress,' letting her fan drop slowly into her lap.

'Yes,' he replied, 'that's good.'

'Oh, excellent!' she answered cheerfully. 'There's only one drawback though.'

'And that is——?'

'Some of them carry them out.'

'What, the ideas? That's better still, isn't it?' he enquired, rather puzzled.

'It's a matter of taste,' she answered serenely. 'I leave it to you to decide, the next time you go to King's Chapel, Cambridge, and see some of the Newnhamites walk up the aisle in their Sunday best. This is surely a very long interval,' she exclaimed, jumping up. 'Why yes! there's my distracted partner rushing up and down, till it makes me hot to look at him. Let us go in.'

CHAPTER II.

It was not till the small hours of the morning that Roger could claim his third and last waltz with Norah. It was danced through in perfect silence, and, as the last notes ceased, Moreton led her out once again on to the balcony—now quite deserted. They made unconsciously for their former seats, with the background of palms, and for a moment or two Moreton did not speak, being entirely occupied in wondering why he hadn't thought this girl pretty at first sight. She made a pretty enough picture at that moment, with her dark soft hair waving round her face, and the red stones glinting every now and then as the light touched them at her white throat. As she looked up, Roger thought of the little princess in a story he had been beguiled into reading to a juvenile audience a day or two previously, who had 'eyes like two bits of night sky, each with a star dissolved in the blue.'

'I am *not* tired!' she said, anticipating Moreton's accusation, 'but I believe I was thinking somewhere down in the depths of my inner consciousness, if one *does* think down there, that my days in town are numbered.'

'Ah! you will be sorry to leave London?'

'Sorry? Well, Clarelands isn't as exciting as London, quite,' she answered with a short laugh. 'But then it is bad for the young to have excitement, isn't it?'

'I should have thought it was worse for the old,' returned Moreton; 'it might carry them off prematurely. Shall we put it down as an unavoidable necessity, and bear it philosophically?'

'I am determined to bear all *I* get with Christian fortitude,' said Norah, stooping to pick up a flower that had fallen from her dress.

'What are you going to do when you get back to Surrey?' enquired Moreton suddenly.

'I?' she replied, raising her eyebrows a little. 'Oh, the "usual round, the common task," which of course furnishes all I need to ask, &c. I shall try experiments as usual, I suppose.'

'What is the latest experiment?' enquired Moreton.

'Just at present, I'm learning to write novels after Besant's recipe.'

'Ah! so am I,' he returned just as calmly.

'No, really! are you?' she exclaimed. 'You mean you've

learnt, I suppose. How interesting! Do tell me what you write, and where you write it, and all about it.’

Roger, laughing at her whirlwind of questions, owned to a little tale in the ——— *Magazine*.

‘Did you write *that*?’ she exclaimed, looking at him with a new expression of admiration, which Moreton found a trifle embarrassing. ‘I like it.’

A long conversation on the merits and demerits of the story followed, in which Norah did not spare criticism. She objected to the girl in the tale, as being the usual masculine type of a good woman, ‘as colourless and uninteresting as—as a white mouse, for instance.’ For her part, she wasn’t interested in white mice—though, on reflection, she supposed men must be, ‘for whenever you met a white-mousey woman, she was generally married.’

Still, on the whole, Moreton could not but be flattered by her evident appreciation of the story, and thanked Providence devoutly that he hadn’t developed his ‘white mouse’ more strongly.

On turning to the subject of Norah’s own literary efforts, she declared they did not prosper. Her difficulty was Moreton’s reversed—she knew no men. ‘Oh yes, of course, I have met men since I’ve been in town,’ she replied, in answer to Moreton’s question, ‘but I see them all under one set of circumstances, and the consequence is they strike me as being very much alike, or at any rate constructed only on two or three patterns.’

The dance was just beginning in the ball-room, and the room was full of men. ‘Now,’ she went on, bending forward to get a full view, ‘look there; I’ve seen them all before in the *Graphic*. Don’t you remember a picture that came out some time ago of the different classes of men at a ball? Look! there’s the dancing young man; there’s the man (leaning against the door) who finds things such “an awful bore, don’t you know.” There’s the cheerful young man, just going up to that girl in white, who will say to his hostess when he goes, “Awfully jolly dance, Mrs. Robson; never enjoyed anything so much in my life!” He has said that on an average three times a week for the last five years.’ And, much to Moreton’s amusement, she went on pointing out one after another, whose appearance certainly was not far from her description.

‘It was a good thing that I took the precaution to gather from you at the beginning of the evening that you didn’t know any-one here,’ she concluded confidentially, ‘or I should have certainly

pointed out all your best friends. And yet,' she continued thoughtfully, 'in a room like this, there must be a great many men worth knowing and respecting, and worth writing about.'

'I like your faith in human nature, Miss Kingsley; may it never be confounded!—seriously, I mean,' he said, replying to the look in her eyes as she raised them.

'But you haven't told me yet to what class *I* belong. Don't spare my feelings, I beg; I'm used to having them trampled on, and at the best of times I am but a crushed worm.'

She looked at him a moment, and then said slowly, 'I don't know; I think I shall be obliged to make a separate class for you.' After a pause, 'Do you feel lonely in it? If so, I will put you in with the common herd.'

'There's a certain distinction in having a class made for one,' answered Moreton reflectively. 'No, I think I'll stay where I am put, even though it is on account of the possession of unfortunate characteristics.'

From this they drifted into rather a serious talk. Norah seemed genuinely interested in Moreton's literary prospects, and then, though she had always wanted to, she had never met many literary men, and only one before who wrote stories. Something in her tone led Roger to ask whether that one was a success.

'Not quite,' she replied quietly.

And then, little by little, encouraged by Roger's sympathetic manner, the girl revealed, almost unconsciously, a great deal of her dreary, crushing life at Clarelands. He, on his part, was conscious of a sudden rush of pity and tenderness for her. 'Poor child! poor child!' he found himself mentally repeating. 'All her impulses checked, and she sees no way of escape!'

She was telling him of the independent life of one of her friends, who was studying medicine. 'She lived in rooms by herself,' Norah said.

'But that is not the kind of thing *you* would like to do?' he asked. 'That is not your ideal of a happy woman's life?'

'No,' she answered; 'it may be best for some women, but for most, for nearly all, the best thing is to fall in love with the right man and marry him. I don't know how I know it, but it is true.' She was looking out, away, through the uncovered end of the balcony, up to the fading stars, and she spoke as though she had forgotten Moreton's presence, and was responding to a train of thoughts his words had roused. 'For myself, I would rather marry a man who was rising into fame, and feel that I had

helped him to be great, than become the greatest doctor or the most celebrated novelist—*myself*—that the world has ever known.'

Moreton hardly took in the sense of her words. He was watching her face with its softened expression, regretting that in a few moments she would be gone, and thinking that this was not the last he meant to see of her, when he was startled by a sudden movement of hers. She had gathered up her flowers and her fan, and was now standing before him, saying in a cool, every-day voice, 'This dance will be over in a moment, Mr. Moreton, and we must go now; will you take me back?'

'Certainly,' was all he could find to say, getting up in bewilderment and offering her his arm. In a few moments, as it seemed to him, he was watching Mrs. Macleod's departing carriage, still wondering in a confused way at the abrupt change in the girl's manner.

Mrs. Robson kept him quite half an hour longer, gossiping over the events of the evening.

'Who was that little fellow, got up as a cavalier, or something of the kind?' he asked as he put on his overcoat in the hall.

'Oh! that was Digby Harfield, the journalist, you know; he writes for the — *Magazine* sometimes. By the way, he has positively *lived* up at the Macleods' lately. I don't know whether Kitty is the attraction.'

'Or her friend perhaps?' replied Moreton, shaking hands as he opened the door.

It was strange, Kitty thought, how unaccountably absent-minded Norah was during the exchange of confidences which inevitably followed, when the girls reached their room. The cause of 'this thushness' (Kitty's expression, not mine) was, however, discovered before they at last separated.

Norah had been industriously brushing cinders under the grate for some time. 'Kitty!' she said suddenly, still with her head bent over the fire, 'do you ever say—awfully stupid things to your partners?—at dances I mean.'

Kitty laughed.

'Should I be Kitty Macleod if I didn't?'

'You see,' said her friend, still polishing the grate diligently, 'I've lived amongst girls so much that I'm afraid I don't know how to talk to men—I say too much—I forget that they—well, that they *are* men, and I say things just as I should to a girl, things that they might take differently from what I meant—they might think that I meant *things*—' She sat up suddenly, and

Kitty noticed that there was a good deal of colour on her cheeks, but then of course the fire was warm.

'I like your lucid explanation,' she said. 'Now I should like to know what you mean by *things*. For *they*, of course, read *he*, which is, being interpreted, Mr. Moreton, I suppose? Look here, you goose,' rising with a little yawn, and gently ignoring Norah's attempted indignant reply, 'trouble your head no more with anything you said to him, or he to you, for, if he's like the rest of them, he's forgotten every word of it by now! Good night, dear child, dream of—whom shall we say?—Mr. Moreton, and that you are—no, how very stupid of me!—that of course you are *not* flirting with him!'

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days and life at Clarelands had begun again for Norah, more dreary, more hopelessly grey than ever, in contrast with her golden month in town. Her chief comfort lay in Kitty's frequent letters, and the hope of a visit from her at midsummer. From these letters Norah learnt (though of course it did not concern her in the least) that Roger Moreton had become a constant visitor at the Macleods'. Kitty was enthusiastic in his praise; 'He was a universal genius,' she said. Did Norah know he was an artist as well as a writer? 'They will marry and live happily ever after,' thought Norah. 'How nice for Kitty!' she added, crushing up the letter in her hand and throwing it into the fire. At last the summer came, bringing Kitty with all the rest of its bright things. The two girls spent a great deal of the hot dreamy days that July on the verandah leading from Norah's own room. (Mrs. Pierson did not sit on verandahs.) 'If it were only summer always!' exclaimed Norah, as, on one of these occasions, they were indulging in deck chairs and novels; 'things seem so much more *possible* in the summer.'

'Strawberries, for instance,' murmured Kitty with a longing glance at the beds by the side of the house. 'I know what you mean, dear,' she added with a change of tone and a little caress. 'Have you heard from Mr. Moreton since he sent you that book you told me about?' she asked, as though the subject had anything to do with Norah's remark (which was of course absurd). 'You never will say if you like him, Norah. Do you?' she persisted.

'My dear child, I've only seen him once,' Norah replied in an indifferent tone, though the colour rose to her face; 'but, yes! I liked him. You needn't be so painfully literal with him as you must be with most people; he understands without asking what you mean every other minute, and he doesn't limit his remarks to the purely obvious either; that is, what I remember of him of course.'

'Well, I'm glad for the sake of my brain that his remarks to me are of a purely obvious nature,' replied Kitty.

'Taking the form of compliments then, naturally?' asked Norah, turning her head suddenly.

'Compliments? Oh no! we are far from being on sentimental terms. I like him immensely, and we are very good friends, nothing more. I never flirt with him or anything. I shouldn't know how to begin with him for *anything*.'

'Wonders will never cease,' laughed Norah with sudden lightness. 'Here's Kitty Macleod confessing that there's one man on the face of the earth with whom she actually doesn't know how to flirt.'

Almost before the words were uttered, she was startled by an exclamation from Kitty. 'Talk of the angels,' she said excitedly, 'why there's Mr. Moreton himself—look, Norah—coming over the fields!'

There was no mistake about it, and, what was more, he was evidently making for the house.

'He will think there is no escaping me,' cried Kitty. 'I meet him everywhere now, even in the wilds of Surrey.'

'Whatever brings him here, I wonder?' asked Norah.

'Love and esteem for Mrs. Pierson, of course, dear. It's quite unnecessary to hang so far over the verandah for that bit of honeysuckle, Norah; it looks extremely dangerous, and there is plenty higher up. Besides, I don't in the least mind seeing you blush. It's becoming, I often wish I could do it myself; a judicious blush is most effective on occasions—quite does away with the necessity for speech; but, unfortunately, I'm not given to it. There's the bell! and my hair all out of curl!'

'Do come down,' entreated Norah as the servant appeared.

'Not for the world, till I look a little less of a sight,' answered Kitty, who was touching up her fluffy hair before the glass. 'Where on earth are my curling tongs? Oh, here! Now trot along, child, and give him my blessing.'

And it all seemed so natural that half an hour afterwards the

party (not inclusive of Mrs. Pierson) should be seated at afternoon tea under the mulberry tree on the lawn. Everything had arranged itself before the impudent manœuvres of Kitty, who, with tender solicitude, had herself carried a cup of tea into the darkened drawing-room, 'because your head is so bad, you know, dear Mrs. Pierson.' She had also entirely dissipated the air of frigid reserve with which Norah had at first been inclined to treat Roger. Mrs. Pierson's rather disconcerting questions to him had been answered in a speech of more neatness than veracity, to the effect that, having taken a holiday for some sketching, he had come to Rilford for the purpose, and was now staying at the 'Wheatsheaf' Inn. Here, recollections of former happy days at Clarelands had assailed him, and he had succumbed to the desire of renewed acquaintanceship with its mistress. By way of relaxation from the strain which this severe exercise of the imaginative faculties had caused, Roger now indulged in a more protracted gaze at Norah than he had yet allowed himself.

From the moment she had entered the room, he had known that the longing to see her, which had brought him to Rilford, was no mere fancy. She was thinner than he remembered her, he noticed, but her colour was very bright and pretty, her soft white dress suited her figure exactly, and the cluster of yellow briar roses at her waist was perfection. And this was only the first with Norah at afternoon tea—literally *tête à tête*, for, extraordinary as it sounds, Kitty's whole nature seemed to change from that afternoon. She developed a touching regard for Mrs. Pierson, she read sermons to her (in which there was never a stop), she administered *sal volatile*. But why enlarge on these acts of charity to Mrs. Pierson? Whenever Moreton called, which was not seldom, her toilet was never performed, and consequently, though it was very hard on Norah, it was generally half an hour before Kitty's head, beautifully curled, as it ought to have been after all that time, appeared with the rest of her person upon the scene.

In proportion to the growing steadiness of character which Kitty evinced, Norah became more distinctly frivolous. She liked talking to Mr. Moreton better than to Newnhamites. *They* had caused her none of those sudden thrills to which she was subject occasionally when his eyes met hers, and a sudden silence fell between them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE days slipped away, and all too soon came the evening before Kitty's departure for town. She was running about from room to room collecting her scattered property, when all at once she appeared before Norah, who was sitting in her bedroom, with some magazines in her hand.

'These are yours, aren't they?' she said, coming up to the window where her friend sat; 'I was just going to pack them up. By the way, I've just got half a page of a tale to finish. It's a horrid thing, but I want to see how it ends. Have you read it?'

'Read what?' repeated Norah absently.

'Poor thing!' murmured Kitty tenderly, with a glance at her face. 'Of course not, why do I ask? The leaves aren't even cut.'

Silence for a moment. Then a low chuckle from the reader. 'Look here, Norah, I must just read you this bit where the girl almost proposes to the man in the conservatory. Listen!'

Norah's fancy work slipped from her hands, as in a mock tragic voice Kitty began to read, throwing in little mocking comments every now and then by way of emphasis. She did the author full justice by her rendering, mimicking the girl's voice, and doing the man's alarmed and flurried replies to perfection.

'Poor thing, don't you pity him?' she said at length, dropping the book with a laugh. 'I just want to see if she makes him marry her, or whether he gets out of it,' she continued, turning over the pages, 'but it's getting too dark to read.'

'Let me see that,' said Norah, taking the magazine almost violently from Kitty's hand.

'It isn't signed,' returned Kitty in a surprised tone, 'and prettily behaved little girls generally say "Please" when they want anything. I'm going to light the lamp; the matches are outside, I believe?'

She came back in a few seconds with a light, put it on the writing-table, and crossed over to the window where Norah was still sitting. The book had dropped from her lap to the floor, and, as Kitty stooped to pick it up, she touched her hands.

'Why, child!' she exclaimed, 'your hands are like ice, and,' with a look at her face, 'you are as white as a ghost. You've taken cold, sitting at this open window like a graven image, that's what it is,' she said, drawing her friend to an easy-chair and wrapping a shawl round her. 'I'm going downstairs to fetch

you a glass of wine. You are not going to be allowed to faint, just as if you were an ordinary girl, and hadn't been to Newnham, remember ! And after you've had that, you will go to bed at once, if not sooner, my dear young friend !'

Norah was picking some roses next morning for Kitty to take back with her. She stood, shaking the heavy raindrops from their leaves, when she was startled by a step behind her.

Moreton saw that she was very pale as she turned and faced him, but he was too eager to check his words.

'Miss Kingsley—Norah,' he began, 'I am so glad to find you alone ! I——' he paused ; the expression in her eyes was unmistakable.

'Excuse me, but I am busy seeing Kitty off,' she said coldly, still looking at him unwaveringly. 'You will find Aunt Pierson in the drawing-room, but I'm afraid I can't attend to anything now.'

Moreton looked at her for one moment, then bowed, and, raising his hat, turned and went down the path, and out at the gate.

A day or two later, as Moreton was standing once more in his London rooms, looking out of the window at nothing in particular, the following note was brought to him :

'Dear Mr. Moreton,' it ran, 'can you call this evening to see us ? I want to speak to you about something *very particularly*, so please come as early as you can. We shall be alone. Yours sincerely, Kitty Macleod.'

It was getting dusk when Moreton reached the Macleods' house in Bayswater. He went straight into the drawing-room where Mrs. Macleod and Kitty were sitting in the subdued light of the shaded lamps, before a bright fire, the evening being chilly. They rose to greet him, and Mrs. Macleod stayed talking a few minutes in her pretty graceful way, and then, saying she had a letter to write and would join them presently, went out of the room.

Moreton did not sit down again after closing the door. He leant against the corner of the mantelpiece, looking down at Kitty. 'I am so glad you sent for me,' he said. 'Do you know, when your note came, I had half made up my mind to call on you this evening and ask you a question.'

'Tell me what it was,' she returned, looking up.

'Do you know how I have been so unfortunate as to offend Miss Kingsley? I have been racking my brains ceaselessly,' he went on, almost fiercely, 'and I am no nearer the solution of the mystery than I was on Monday.'

Kitty looked at him again. 'Poor fellow!' she thought, 'he looks positively ill with worry'; aloud she said with an approving nod, 'That's very nice of you to come to the point so quickly, for it's just what I wanted you about. As a rule, I don't believe in interfering in other people's love—in other people's concerns, I mean.'

'But please let the word you used first, remain on *my* side at least,' he interposed. 'We are friends, aren't we? and you know all about it, so we need not pretend. Oh, you know very well, Miss Macleod, that this is a life-and-death matter with me!'

Kitty again nodded in quite a maternal fashion. 'That's all right. Now I can say what I like, and not pick and choose my words, which is a great comfort. Well, Mr. Moreton, I was as much puzzled at Norah's strange behaviour as you. Oh! I have racked my brains, too—you haven't had the monopoly of that pleasing occupation, but *my* racking has produced an idea. It may be quite wrong, I don't know, but I want you to see if *this* throws any light on the matter,' and Kitty handed him a magazine open, and pointed to the page.

Moreton looked at her in astonishment, and then, moving near the light, began to read, Kitty watching him breathlessly. He read on for a moment, and then his look of bewilderment changed to one of recognition and anger. With a smothered exclamation he turned upon Kitty as if she had been the offender.

'Who has dared——?' he began.

'Is there anything there that Norah ever said to you?' interposed Kitty quickly.

'The whole thing is so abominably exaggerated, and so—' he paused for a moment with clenched hands—'so atrociously misconstrued, that if I had read it under ordinary circumstances, I shouldn't have noticed anything,' tossing the magazine contemptuously aside; 'but it is certainly meant, in parts, for a conversation which I remember having with Miss Kingsley on the night of the Robsons' dance.'

'Now,' said Kitty, as one who reasons with a fractious offspring, 'come and sit down here, don't be excited, and tell me all about this, beginning at the beginning, and leaving off at the end;' and

she pointed out a chair to Moreton, who was now pacing up and down the room in uncontrollable anger.

'That's better,' she said, when he obeyed her gesture. 'At the Robsons' dance, you say?'

'Yes. You know, of course, that we were great friends when she was much younger, and partly because of this, I dare say, and partly through my questions, she was led to tell me about her life at Clarelands. As for *this*—' he put his finger hurriedly on the paragraph where the heroine made what amounted to a confession of love to the young man beside her—'the—gentleman has drawn on his powers of imagination, as you will, of course, observe. He may be congratulated on the result.'

'Yes, but poor Norah,' sighed Kitty almost inaudibly, 'how she must have felt!'

Moreton sprang up again. 'Miss Macleod, it is intolerable, unbearable; and Miss Kingsley believes, I suppose, that I—Oh! it is not possible.'

'Mr. Moreton, don't *ramp*,' said Kitty calmly. 'Excuse the word if it's slang, I'm trying to break myself of it, but it comes out on occasions like these. 'That's right, now I can go on. Where were you sitting when you and Norah had this conversation?'

'On that balcony leading out of the ball-room, just in front of the palms.'

'Oh, yes!' murmured Kitty complacently, looking into the fire, 'I thought so. So did we, only *we* sat *behind* the palms. We found it quieter.'

In a second he remembered the chairs in the recess behind the plants—yes, and even the scent of a cigar which had pervaded the balcony! Fool that he had been not to think of it!

'Miss Macleod,' he said imploringly, 'if you think you can solve this, don't keep me in suspense!'

Kitty withdrew her eyes from the fire.

'This is only my idea, mind, Mr. Moreton, but, such as it is, you are welcome to it, and I'm going to be quite frank with you,' she added, with a bewitching smile, 'because we are both Norah's friends. When she was staying with me last winter, a man we unfortunately knew fell in love with her, and proposed to her, and she refused him. I won't tell you his name, because I'm not positively sure I am right in what I am going to say, though I'm morally certain.'

'I know his name,' said Moreton.

Kitty stopped and looked at him.

'How did you guess?' she said; 'at any rate it can't be helped. This man was quite infatuated with Norah at the time, but after all it was merely his vanity that was so dreadfully hurt when she refused him. That man was at the Robsons' dance.'

'And you think——?' asked Moreton slowly.

'That little recess behind the palms was awfully quiet and retired,' she answered; 'it *might* have happened that some one had strolled out there to get away from the madding crowd; anyhow it is a strange coincidence that Mr. ——, this man we are talking of, writes for the —— *Magazine*.'

'But why—what do you think was the object of this ——?' Roger paused, a hundred conflicting emotions struggling for the mastery.

'His reasons?' answered Kitty, jumping up and beginning to arrange the flowers in a jar on the mantelpiece with restless fingers. 'Perhaps he thought there were good points about the conversation, which would "tell"—that's the right word, isn't it?—in a story. Some of the remarks sound like Norah, but chiefly I'm *certain*,' she went on, turning round and looking at Moreton with a flash of anger in her blue eyes which showed that, for all her airiness, Miss Kitty could be a dangerous enemy, 'he thought that Norah might see it, and think it was *you*. You told her you sometimes wrote for that magazine, you remember. It was to be a kind of—manly retaliation for her refusal, you know.'

But few more words were needed of explanation on Kitty's side as to how she had been led to the discovery, partly by Norah's question after the ball (and though no confidences were betrayed there was an intimation of a further clue in her manner when the story had been read), and, on Moreton's part, of incoherent but no less fervent thanks, and then he rose to go.

'What are you going to do now?' enquired Kitty as he held out his hand.

'I'm going to Kilford,' he replied, taking up his hat.

The girl looked at him approvingly. 'I'm afraid there isn't a train to-night—quite,' she said demurely, glancing at the clock and then at his hat; 'the next one starts about 2.15 A.M., and Mrs. Pierson is not an early riser.'

'And if this doesn't turn out properly, I'll give up the profession of private detective!' exclaimed Kitty to her mother later on.

'Being otherwise disposed of,' said Mrs. Macleod, smothering

a sigh at the thought of a certain interview she had also had with a young man that day.

'Please, Miss, there's some one in the drawing-room as wants to speak to you.'

Norah was sitting upstairs, pretending to read political economy and detesting it in her heart.

'Some one about that bazaar at the schools, I suppose,' she thought. 'Very well, Mary; say I'll be down in a minute;' and she rose listlessly to give those few touches to her hair and dress without which a girl never goes down to see 'some one in the drawing-room,' even if her heart feels like lead.

As she opened the door, some one—a man—rose to meet her. Her eyes were dazzled at coming out of the sunny hall into the darkened room, and for a moment she did not see who it was; only for a moment, then she felt herself turning white, and put her hand on the back of a chair for support, while she looked at Moreton.

'Miss Kingsley,' he began, 'I came because I wanted to speak to you about *this*.' And, looking down, she saw he held a magazine in his hand. She tried to draw herself up and summon her dignity to her aid. But he had taken her by surprise, and her lips trembled. Before she could speak, he went on hurriedly: 'I could not rest till I had seen you. So you could think that I?—No!' he broke off suddenly—'all that can wait,' and, quickly coming towards her, he snatched her hands before she could resist him.

'Norah, I love you, you know that, and you must know that this abominable thing is all a mistake!'

'And Kitty is engaged to Mr. Redmaine, that nice man she flirted so desperately with last winter, you know,' said Norah after a considerable interval. 'Only this morning when I got her letter I was contrasting her life with mine, and thinking—Oh, Roger, if it hadn't been for that dance at the Robsons!'

Mrs. Robson was giving an unusually brilliant 'at home' the following winter. Her pretty rooms were bright with lights and flowers, and the buzz of conversation was at its height.

'Who are those two, the graceful-looking woman in white, and the tall man going to the piano with her?' whispered a lady to her hostess as the talk subsided.

'Mr. and Mrs. Moreton. You've heard of Mr. Moreton of course? He's a barrister, but he writes a good deal; you must have read some of his things. They are extremely original and

clever, my husband says, I get so little time for reading myself. His wife writes too; they are bringing out a book together, I believe. They met for the first time at my house, so I take all the credit of their marriage,' she went on, laughing. 'Yes, a sweet-looking woman. Pretty, do you think? Not quite—picturesque is the word—yes, striking and picturesque certainly.'

'And the gentleman shaking hands with her, who is he?'

'Oh! that's Mr. Digby Harfield the journalist, you know. Where is he now? I want him to recite in a minute. He didn't talk to Mrs. Moreton long,' she said with some surprise, which would perhaps have been greatly increased could she have overheard the few words they exchanged.

Norah had seen him coming towards her, as she rose from accompanying her husband's song; and a letter from Kitty (who was on a visit to Charley Redmaine's friends), which she had received that morning, was fresh in her memory.

'That tale, you know, *was* Digby Harfield's. I was determined to find out, and Charley knows him a little (*I've* never spoken to the little wretch since). At my instigation, Charley laid a beautiful trap nicely baited with praise of the story, into which he fell like a lamb. He owned that the thing was his, 'the best little thing he had ever done,' he said.

These words were in Norah's mind, as she gave Mr. Digby Harfield the tips of her fingers, and said, 'I must congratulate you on the success of your book.'

After a few words had been exchanged, she added: 'By the way, Mr. Harfield, if ever you want any help in the dialogue of your novels, I shall be glad to render you any assistance in my power—only please let me know beforehand, so that I may polish my sentences a little. I'm afraid you misunderstood a few of the remarks you did me the honour to immortalise in that tale of yours. Let me see, "A Man's Mistake," wasn't it? (I thought it a very good title at the time). Perhaps I talked a little too fast for you? At any rate' (with a sweet smile) 'you will let me know another time, won't you?'

'I think it has been a success,' said Mrs. Robson to her husband, as she put out one of the candles that had burnt low, after her guests had departed. 'The only thing I regretted was that Mr. Harfield couldn't give us the recitation he promised. He came to me in the middle of the evening to say he must go—important business, or something, I think he said.'

N. SYRETT.

Ballad.

HER sisters three had lovers three,
 And troth rings on their hand—
 No lover had fair Marjory,
 The fairest in the land.

There came an unknown knight to her,
 Within the forest way—
 They wandered long, they wandered late,
 To the ending of the day.

‘Oh, turn again with me,’ she said,
 ‘The wind is strong and bleak—
 And long I’ve left my father’s house,
 And long, long will they seek.’

‘I may not turn, fair Marjory,
 However bleak it be—
 I’m no guest for thy father’s hall,
 I am no love for thee.

‘Oh, haste thee, for the night falls fast,
 On to thy father’s gate.
 Ne’er had we met, if we had known
 That we should part so late.’

‘But yet I will not turn,’ she said,
 ‘Though wind be keen and strong—
 Too long I’ve left my father’s hall;
 And we have wandered long.’

‘Thou may’st not follow, Marjory,
 Whither I must be gone.
 Had I known what thy face would be,
 I ne’er had looked thereon.’

He left no kiss upon her lips,
Upon her brow no kiss;
But deep he looked into her eyes,
And she looked deep in his.

She stood before her father's hall,
As 'twere an alien place—
And strange her beauty seemed to them,
As of an unknown face.

Three noble knights her sisters wed,
And merry hearts had they—
And Marjory danced among the guests
Upon their wedding day.

Oh, ever yet she seemed most fair,
But like a star grown dim.
There came to her an unknown knight
And prayed her dance with him.

He looked into her dreaming eyes,
Where never a smile there shone.
Then Marjory put her hand in his,
And still the dance went on.

Light was her step as raindrop's fall,
As they went through the throng—
Within her eyes a look of rest
That had been absent long.

So silently they left the dance,
There was none bade them stay—
Yet ere the dawn, with looks of fear,
They followed on her way.

They found her as the morning broke,
There where she lay alone.
There was a light upon her face,
She clasped a cross of stone.

MAY KENDALL.

The Procession of Spring.

IN the heart of a big city there lived a very learned botanist. *Campylotropous, quintuplinerved, tetradynamous*, not a flower of them all could puzzle him—he was a very learned botanist.

None the less there was a great blank in his life, and it was this. He had never seen the blue bird's-eye speedwell. Brown and dry, indeed, he kept within a book a thing that once had been that flower, and he could look at that. But *that* is not to see the bird's-eye speedwell.

The forget-me-not he had seen, for the forget-me-not is sold in penny bunches in the street. Not so the speedwell. Once plucked the bloom falls off and floats down at your feet. The speedwell loves the bit of bank that bounds its home. It knows no other world, nor cares to know; and it is well. The lark knows where to find it when he drops from skies not bluer than itself.

The forget-me-not's is 'the higher mission' you say? It may be so. But we were speaking not of missions but of facts. And the fact remains that the speedwell never left the bank, and so the botanist had never seen the speedwell. For he had but one holiday in all the year, and that was at Christmas-time, when he went to see his old mother.

And as to missions; it is not given to everyone to have 'high missions,' if that means going far afield. If Don Quixote had stayed at home, had looked after the old women and tried the poachers, perhaps he would have done more good in his day.

I fear that could our botanist have seen the speedwell on its bank he would have given it welcome only as *Veronica chamaedrys*, an hypogynous, scrophularious, monopetalous dicotyledon. 'His line,' as he said, 'was classification.' So that, I suppose, was his mission. And no unworthy mission either. For

a love of classification is a love of order, and that at least is a function of the Mind Supreme.

The speedwell has its mission all the same, but more of that by-and-by.

However long the hold of winter on the land, even that strong hand must at last grow weary, and one by one slip out between its loosened fingers the laughing spirits born of spring.

The loveliest pearls that ever pleased a king are not more lovely than the bursting buds upon the willow. In significance, indeed, not half so beautiful. For those that hold the yellow stamens in their folds are presageful of life, while the others are a product of disease.

Children love the budding willow. They call it 'palm,' and pick it as they come to school. But very soon they tire of its prettiness, and so the school path is often strewn with willow. A royal freedom is this of childhood, that lays the whole round year under impost for its play. It is enough that the willow has ventured into the children's kingdom: childhood, imperious, claims it as of right.

Children, whose buoyant blood turns winter into summer, think not of catkins as a sign of spring. But suffering childhood and slow-moving age find here a dear delight. They have looked on so long and wistfully through the weary weeks of winter to where the sun is playing on the green and growing wheat. And so a little country child, with hip disease in a London hospital, cared little for all the hothouse flowers kind ladies brought her (she had so sweet a face), but lay always clasping tight a withered daffodil, and clasping it she died.

From the shallows of the pool over which the willow hangs there comes a voice of spring. It is the croak of frogs. There always seems something magical in the way the frogs appear in the pool. Yesterday not a frog was to be seen. There was the usual sprinkling of beetles, effets, and water-spiders, but not a single frog. This morning as soon as the sun began to warm the water the croaking began on all sides. The shallows are dotted with the brown heads of many frogs. Make the slightest movement and instantly every head disappears. Presently from some corner the croaking begins again in a tentative, intermittent manner. It is not easy to detect the croaker, because at first he keeps himself carefully submerged, allowing only his nose and eyes to break the surface; reminding one of the pictures of the river-horse in books upon African travel. But presently, grown

confident, he will raise his whole head, sending little ripples circling away with every beat of his white distended throat.

Frogs, I fancy, are fond of music. If on this first day of their arrival you sit quietly on the bank and whistle low and plaintively, they will all turn in your direction in evident enjoyment. After a day or two the charm of music fails, for the frogs are busied in spawning.

When once the tadpoles are free they are beset with many foes, not the least formidable of which is *Dytiscus*, the great water beetle, who catches them and sucks their blood. So that of all the myriad tadpoles hatched only a small number endure that change which is not the less wonderful because so familiar—the change from a vegetarian tadpole with gills and tail, to a tailless, air-breathing, insect-eating frog.

The sallow is the only bush now growing by the pool. Last year the underwood was cut, as it is cut every seventh year. No sooner is the sunlight so let in upon the pond than there comes up a thick growth of some aquatic mossy plant, clinging to stub and bottom. The dabchicks are very fond of the weed. They feed upon it and build their nests with it. These birds return with such regularity to these their haunts that 'Have the dabchicks come?' becomes a standing question in the spring. The dabchicks may be there for days before you notice them. Very shy are they when first they come. So beware how you approach the pond. At the first glimpse of water pause and glance carefully ahead, and you may chance to see the dabchick appear as if by magic on the surface of the pool. No diver ever dived for pearls so unweariedly as he for bits of weed. As he rises to the top he picks off the small crustaceans hidden in the leaves, snaps off the young shoot of the weed, and then he dives again. If at that instant you run forward at your best speed some dozen yards or so, and then again stay quiet as a stone, the bird on rising continues unsuspecting its pursuit. But move never so little, and like a flash it disappears, and, in a succession of rapid dives, soon is far away. There are divers and divers. The dabchick dives quite noiselessly, and that is the test of a true diver. By this you may know that it is accustomed to seek its food near the bottom and in deep water. Some birds dive chiefly for purposes of concealment and some for purposes of play. These last are clumsiest of all. Thus, the waterhen dives neatly but not noiselessly, the tame duck very clumsily and with much flapping of wings.

There surely never seemed so uncomfortable a nest as that of

the dabchick. The guillemot who guards its single egg on the ledges of a wind-swept precipice is, one might suppose, cosily circumstanced by comparison. The nest itself is *in* not *on* the water, so that the dabchick almost sits in water as it sits upon its eggs. And whenever the bird leaves its nest it covers up its eggs with wet weed, and the eggs, white at first, soon become stained and brown. The nest is so deceptive in appearance—just a tangled mass of water-weed—that even the sharp eye of the schoolboy seldom finds it out.

For the direct opposite of this, see the nest of the waterhen. Fair and open, it is placed where the end of a sunken willow-bough peeps out of the water. The bird has just slipped off the nest. There are seven eggs already; it is easy enough to count them from the bank. The schoolboys found the nest some days ago. Next Saturday afternoon they will fish out all the eggs with a scoop at the end of a stick. A 'goord' they call it; by which they mean a 'goad.' Poor moorhen! Her eggs make such a gallant show when threaded on a string.

Long before the moorhens began to build the rooks and jackdaws were hard at work. A pleasant scene is that of a rookery in early spring. Few sounds have so much power to recall forgotten scenes as the noise of building rooks. I think the caw of rooks would make an English Sunday in the middle of a desert. But grievous charges are brought against the rook, which, sad to say, cannot be disproved outright. The practice of shooting young rooks has been given up to a great extent of late years. So that rooks, it seems, are increasing in numbers, and northwards farmers have combined for their destruction. Well, a return to the rook rifle would soon thin their numbers to a sufficient extent. Let us have no murderous strychnine sown about the land. If rookeries must be destroyed wholesale, let it at least be those that are removed from dwellings, to save that stain on hospitality, the charge of confidence misplaced. For I have even known those that have ruthlessly destroyed this the chief ornament—a heronry excepted,—of an ancient home.

But this is uncomfortable ground. It is pleasanter to think of those who would pour libations to the shade of Virgil if only rooks would come to their tall elms.

And if conditions are suitable they may be induced, by the following means, to come. Fasten up in the destined trees some half-score of imitation nests. To these bring nestlings from the nearest rookery. The old birds will find them out, feed them, rear them; and quite probably the next spring will see a rookery begun.

There are two plants of very different species which thrive exceedingly well under a rookery, and both are among the earliest flowers of spring. The first—dog-mercury—has a green-spiked flower; and the other, that forms a thick carpet of dark green heart-shaped leaves, has a flower that shines like a golden star, and is known to everyone as the lesser celandine.

So, in spite of cruel winds of March, life is feeling its way on. Not these flowers alone, but coltsfoot, barren strawberry, daffodil, and primrose come into flower, and elder into leaf.

The tiny chiffchaff, our first bird of spring, hangs like a humming-bird on shivering wings, taking insects off the surface of the pool. The strange voice of the wryneck sounds about the orchard trees. The country folk call this the 'snake-bird,' because it scares the schoolboys by hissing like a snake when they approach its nest. The 'cuckoo's mate' they call it too, though 'cuckoo's messenger' would be the better name, for it always comes before the cuckoo.

With the help of a tuning-fork it is possible to find the keys in which birds sing. On April 22, 1889, I noticed a cuckoo's song composed of three notes instead of two. The bird flew from tree to tree in front of me, and always with the same strange song. The notes I discovered to be E, D, C, in the key of C major.

The chirrup of the chiffchaff is cheery but monotonous, and goes to make more welcome the wild, bright song of the willow-wren, which comes in at the open windows a few mornings later on.

Both these birds build on the ground. Their nests are domed, and worked in, like the nests of field-mice, among the moss and grass of the pasture by the woodside. Both these birds line their nests with feathers; but their cousin, the wood-wren, whose nest, externally, is so much like their own, never does so.

The wryneck, and all the tits, except of course the longtailed tit, may easily be induced to nest in boxes fixed up in the garden trees. These tiny birds are marvellously bold when nesting. You may carry the box, nest, bird, and all from place to place, and provided you do so quietly the bird will not take wing.

About this time one begins to notice on the garden paths many tops of spruce-fir branches. The squirrel is the culprit. It is a pity he does this, as it prejudices the gardener against him. And why he does so it is hard to say, unless he has a taste for turpentine. The squirrel displays a great degree of cunning in the building, though none in the position, of its 'drey,' or nest.

Instead of springing from branch to branch as at other times, it runs with each load of moss or leaves to the base of the nest-tree, and so ascends. So that the 'drey' is half finished before its presence is suspected. Yet, when surprised, the little creature holds its ground with a degree of boldness that would do credit to a lion. It will stamp and 'chuckut,' advancing and retreating in angry jerks as if daring us to attack. Like most nest-builders it works hardest in the early morning. I am inclined to believe that the squirrel never moves at night. If this is so, it is the only strictly diurnal animal we possess.

Poor little red squirrel! I wonder when the day will come when its present persecutors, worthy persons in their way, shall have learnt to 'be to his faults a little blind,' seeing that there are other things of beauty besides cobnuts.

A warmer day than usual brings out the grass snake. These reptiles are fond of entering the frames in which the gardener raises his seeds. They go there partly for warmth, and partly in search of frogs, which are attracted hither by the abundance of insect life. Later on the snake will lay its leathery eggs in the manure.

The country folk in certain parts are firmly persuaded that the adder as it grows old develops a pair of wings and flies about. They quite believe that they have seen it flying. This diabolical accomplishment intensifies the terrors of the 'death-adder.' Everything that creeps and looks like a snake is a death-adder. The idea arose in church, by a mistake for 'deaf-adder,' long years before the School Board came.

A glance at May, and we must bid farewell to the garden and the pool.

Very beautiful and bright are the children's garlands as they sing beneath the windows on the first of May:

This is the day, the first of May,
Please to remember the garland day.

So runs the couplet that exacts our pence. Remember it? No need to ask us that. The colonist at the other side of the world remembers it, and dreams of home. The convict as he picks his oakum remembers it, and is the better perhaps for the thought.

It is not only birds and children that May-day makes to sing. It beats a sort of song out of very humdrum lives—often but a clumsy rhythm, but a little gain upon the workaday prose. I once knew a rhymers whose fancy it moved thus:

THE COMING OF SPRING.

Grim and long he had held the land,
But the end was come at last,
And he sank down low in his ice-blue throne,
And his breath came hard and fast.

It powdered the mist upon rail and tree,
It huddled the cattle behind the byre,
It buried the hares in a dust of snow,
And scorched the young ash like fire.

'They have cursed me long as the bringer of woes,
The parent of fogs and sleets;
Did they know that I mellowed their land for the grain,
And killed the disease in their streets?

'But a reign that had been more mild, itself
Was ruled by a chance of birth,
When Æolus filled my lungs with breath
So keen that it scathed the earth.

'You may lighten the touch of my iron hand,
You may breathe where I would blow,
You may win more love from a thankless land
Than Winter was born to know.

'Speed on, speed on,' and he died in a blast
That emptied the cells of the North;
And then, as Hermes from the bound
Of heaven, the boy leapt forth.

He met on the way the whistling swans
And the wild geese going home;
And laughed as he poised on his golden wings,
For he knew that his strength was come.—

And sunshine flashed through the cold, clear day,
And reddened the willow's shoot,
And put a love-note in the song of the lark,
And a pulse in the violet's root.

He chanced on a child in a woodland path,
All quiet and still in the sleep
That only the hungry and frozen know,
And the boy was fain to weep.—

His tears fell hot on the ice-bound earth,
And the mantle that Winter had spread
Ever grew less in the rain and the sun,
And the corn lay green in its stead.

So the boy sped on on his errand of love ;
And wherever his spirit came
The dead skies broke into shower or shine,
But never an hour the same.

And things that had lain in hiding long
Crept out to the light of day :
The snake from the bank, the dreaming mouse
From chambered leaves and hay.

The mountain brook, unloosed once more,
Went laughing to the flood,
And ferns hung nodding, damp and green,
Where only boulders stood.

For, as dead embers fanned, the earth
Glowed bright beneath his wing,
Till a new world broke as a living flame,
And sang in the light of Spring.

Yes, Spring had come. Spring with its story of hope. But even now Spring is yielding to a power fuller and higher yet, as greater than hope is assurance.

And from the grass of the bankside looks up a sky-blue flower, and seems to whisper, ' Summer, dear Summer, is here.'

That is the speedwell's mission.

A. B. R. B.

At the Sign of the Ship.

WHEN an American editor is in want of something to write about, he abuses the English sparrow, and when we *causeurs* are in a like strait we fall back on novels. 'The universal novel,' says Mr. Grant Allen, 'must ever hereafter travel in the very self-same path' as Mr. Henry James and Mr. Howells. In that case it is odd that the author of *Kali* and of *John Creedy* does not himself gird up his loins and start on the very self-same path. I have no doubt that, if Mr. Allen started on the path, he would travel on it most happily, but 'miraculous emergence of hero and heroine from incredible fixes' appears to be more the topic of his own romances than 'delicate analysis of character and motive.' If he sees what's right, but only so, and does not practise what he knows, it must be because what he practises is more akin to the public taste than what he preaches. Thus it appears that the Universal Novel is not immediately to start on the sole and single path of 'scientific study of hereditary tendencies,' and the rest. Indeed, Mr. Allen, in a later paragraph, and on a second thought, perhaps, admits that 'the old romance will live more or less bravely,' by the side of the new romance that is delicate and scientific. And that is all which any sensible reader wants. All that we desire is plenty of paths in fiction, not one single highway, with no highway robbers, and no queer adventures at inns. As Mr. Allen hopes, so do we all hope, that any merits of style which the new school possesses may not be lacking to the old school. No romance is any the worse, but far the better, for being well written. To be well written it must be suitably written, and the style which is excellent for a sober, delicate, scientific story, is not so excellent for a tale of adventure. Even the novel-publishing newspapers, as long as they get their weekly allowance of incident, do not grumble, probably, because the language is good. Its excellence, however, depends on the matter.

Elegant and rhythmic English, and dainty and prolonged description, are not in place in a novel of romance; they cease to be in place as soon as the separate charm of the style becomes a rival to the interest of the story. A drama may have too much wit, though this is an uncommon fault, and a story, too, is marred when the attention, instead of being concentrated on the action, is claimed by the manner of the narration. Even in tales of analysis and science, one often sees that the author has paused and nibbled at his pen, while he sought the best, or rather the most unexpected word. This is actually a frequent vice in modern, especially, perhaps, in American, novels which aim at style. There are some readers who prefer these interruptions and delays; they think them proofs of delicacy and of exquisite care. This appears to me to be a fault in any work. Often, it is true, in Shakspeare, one is forced to stop and read again and again some passage, for the extraordinary, astonishing beauty of its manner. But we may be sure that Shakspeare did not stop as he wrote, and work the thing up; Shakspeare who 'never blotted a line.' Of course passages may be 'worked up,' and yet may show no sign of it. For example, there is a beautiful sentence in one of Izaak Walton's *Lives*, which reads in its ample brevity as if it were quite spontaneous. But several rough copies of it, none of them good, are found on the fly-leaf of a book which had been in the possession of Izaak. The error is to employ a research in style which is inappropriate and tardy. This is as much the fault of some good novels in the way of analysis, as recklessness of taste and even of grammar is the fault of some books of adventure. The worst of it is that, to a good many persons, the fault in the former class appears a merit. When Mr. Stevenson, in his admirable *Master of Ballantrae*, makes the old Scotch steward talk about 'the lurching reverberations of the firelight,' he drops, for once, into the error of style which is too often recognised as an excellence. At all events, the business of 'heredity,' as in M. Zola's long series of romances, can never, probably, be much admired by more than a passing fashion. Heredity is much too fleeting and peculiar in its manifestations to be seized scientifically. It is about as manageable as hypnotism, which is scientific too, more or less, and is overworked and tedious. But a novel of heredity is usually thought scientific, while a novel of hypnotic influence is thought romantic. They are about equally scientific, and equally transient.

A proof that novels are not exactly bound on 'the very self-same road as the universal novel' is the reappearance of the

historical novel. For long after the decline of Harrison Ainsworth and G. P. R. James, the historical novel seemed almost extinct. *Esmond* and *The Virginians*, and *The Tale of Two Cities*, and *Romola*, and *Cloister and Hearth*, proved that great and popular novelists like Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, and Charles Reade could venture still on this old path. But few imitated them, and the public was not supposed to care for the attempt. To-day we see historical novels everywhere, not, I hope, in consequence of Mr. Allen's 'recrudescence of barbarism and Jingo reaction'—a very mild little reaction; barbarism will not 'recrudescence' from *that*—but from another quarter. Mr. Allen has not touched that part of the subject—the historical novel—but probably he would agree that its revival is partly due to the revival of historical studies. Of course all the new historical novels have not that origin. Mr. Besant's, for example; he would probably have written whether history was being more closely and widely studied or not. So would the authors of the *Splendid Spur* and *Micah Clarke* have written on distant times, just as Dumas did. But *John Inglesant* had a real and ardent historical motive. Mr. Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and his latest novels proceed from serious historical studies. The history is not 'got up' for the novel, the novel comes out of the knowledge of history. Mr. Haggard probably does not pretend to be scientific, but the new knowledge of and interest in old Egypt makes *Cleopatra* possible. The researches of M. Feydeau (much better known as a novelist than an Egyptologist) were at the root of Théophile Gautier's *Roman d'une Momie*. And now we have, for the latest historical novel, a tale of the Exodus, by an author who was an Egyptologist long before he was a novelist—namely, the *Joshua* of Dr. Georg Ebers (Tauchnitz).

* * *

Dr. Ebers, unfortunately, has long been an invalid. His *Joshua*, for that reason perhaps, is less interesting than his *Uarda*. He has put into the pages of a romance his theory of the journey of Israel from Goshen to Sinai. He had already stated it in his *Durch Gosen nach Sinai*. He begins with the priestly astrologers watching the nocturnal march of the chosen people, from Tanis (Zoan), the capital of the Pharaohs, north of the land of Goshen. One had supposed they started from Memphis. It is not easy to give our idea of the places without a map. Roughly speaking, Tanis is about three days' march north of the

Gulf of Suez, Memphis about the same distance due west. The late Mr. Palmer, in *The Desert of the Exodus* (i. 270), seems to be in favour of Memphis, not of Tanis. Mr. Palmer's book was written before M. Naville's excavations, and probably Dr. Ebers is right. Mr. Palmer supposes the Israelites to have avoided the Egyptian mines and convict settlements in Sinai; Dr. Ebers makes them attack the guards there, and release the prisoners. He has a fight at Pithom (Succoth) too, where the Bible has none. He thinks that Serbal is the Sinai of the Law; Mr. Palmer is for Jebel Músa. But all this is ancient geography. When Dr. Ebers makes Hur, an elderly Israelite, 'propose,' as in a modern novel, to Miriam, he shows no great humour, especially as Miriam, that 'young girl,' was older than Moses, who was very old indeed. It is funny, too, when Hosea (Joshua), lately high in his Egyptian Majesty's service, says he 'must speak strongly to Moses.' Then Joshua wants to speak to Miriam also, but as Hur (who has already had his innings) is standing by, this proves inconvenient. Hur goes away, and Miriam lets Joshua 'hold her hand,' but first wants to know the news. Finally, she tells Joshua the history of her heart, and how somebody had lent her Egyptian novels, 'books full of tales which could never have been true,' and love poetry, and how Moses converted her from idolatry. Joshua promises to share her views, political and religious, and then, I am happy to say, 'with a thrill of joy she returned his ardent kiss.' But Joshua had not gone so far in refusing terms from Pharaoh as Miriam wished, so she withdrew her acceptance of his hand. Later, with a wan smile, she said to Joshua, 'I am but a weak woman.' There is another love affair; a young Israelite is attached to a fair Egyptian widow, a flirt, who tapped the hand of an Egyptian prince with her fan, 'in gay audacity.' When they all come to the Red Sea, from the North, the topography is not very clear, and 'a glance at the map' does not show why they crossed the sea at all. However, Miriam married Hur, after all, though Joshua was the only man she had really loved. Joshua told Hur he would not marry her now, not even if Hur got a divorce. Kasana, that pretty coquette of Egypt, and serpent of old Nile, was in love with Joshua after all, and her love caused her death. But Joshua and Miriam came to be on quite friendly terms, and Miriam admitted that she had done the wrong thing. 'And although love was laid in the grave, still he and she would

never cease to strive hand in hand for the same end, and to walk in the same way.' So Joshua dined with Hur after the victory of Rephidim, and they had *Kalb Koteletten*, probably, having, indeed, just killed a calf.

* * *

Perhaps this moving love story has been recited with horrid flippancy. But it all seems so odd and so out of place, in the stress of the Exodus. That is the difficulty of historical novels, especially on sacred subjects. And, let it be granted that the age of Moses is vaguely stated in the Bible, still, he had been brought up, according to Dr. Ebers, with Mineptah, who was over fifty, and Miriam, 'the young girl,' was older than Moses. Another great difficulty, the style, occurs in *Joshua*, at least in the translation. It is quaint to say that Moses 'exerted the full weight of his commanding individuality.' Yet, what are you to say? You have a choice between the style of the newspapers and of Wardour Street English. The best parts of *Joshua* are the descriptions of fights and scenes on the march.

* * *

IN SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Some score or so of little lads,
 Whose ages range from four to seven
 (Here truth, uncompromising, adds
 That one, the booby, is eleven),
 In suits of various shapes and size—
 The most of them are minus collars—
 With restless limbs and eager eyes:
 You see my class of Sunday scholars.

The very simplest lessons theirs—
 A verse or two, a text repeated;
 Each brow an anxious pucker wears
 Until the weighty task's completed.
 Then teacher's turn—and once again
 She tells the ancient Bible story
 Of Daniel in the lions' den,
 Or Solomon in all his glory.

Or how the kindly Shunammite,
 Who built her guest the little study,
 Was promised, to her heart's delight,
 'A what?'—'A wee machine and cuddy.'
 But when I read how Samson found
 A lion in the way and slew it,
 A tender infant's boasts resound,
 'Gie me a poker and I'll do it!'

Then comes the parting hymn, which brings
 An end to all my Sunday labour;
 Each youngster finds the place, and sings
 A little louder than his neighbour.
 But as they straggle out of school,
 One weeps because he's lost his bonnet—
 A younger brother, as a rule,
 Is sitting all the time upon it.

Yet sometimes in these childish eyes
 There comes a light, a thought, and straightway
 They seem to pierce earth's cloudy skies,
 And gaze beyond the Golden Gateway.
 And surely to a little child
 The promise long ago was given:
 'Of such'—the Master turned and smiled—
 'The kingdom is of Heaven.'

M. C. E.

A. LANG.

The 'Donna.'

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